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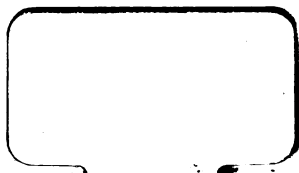
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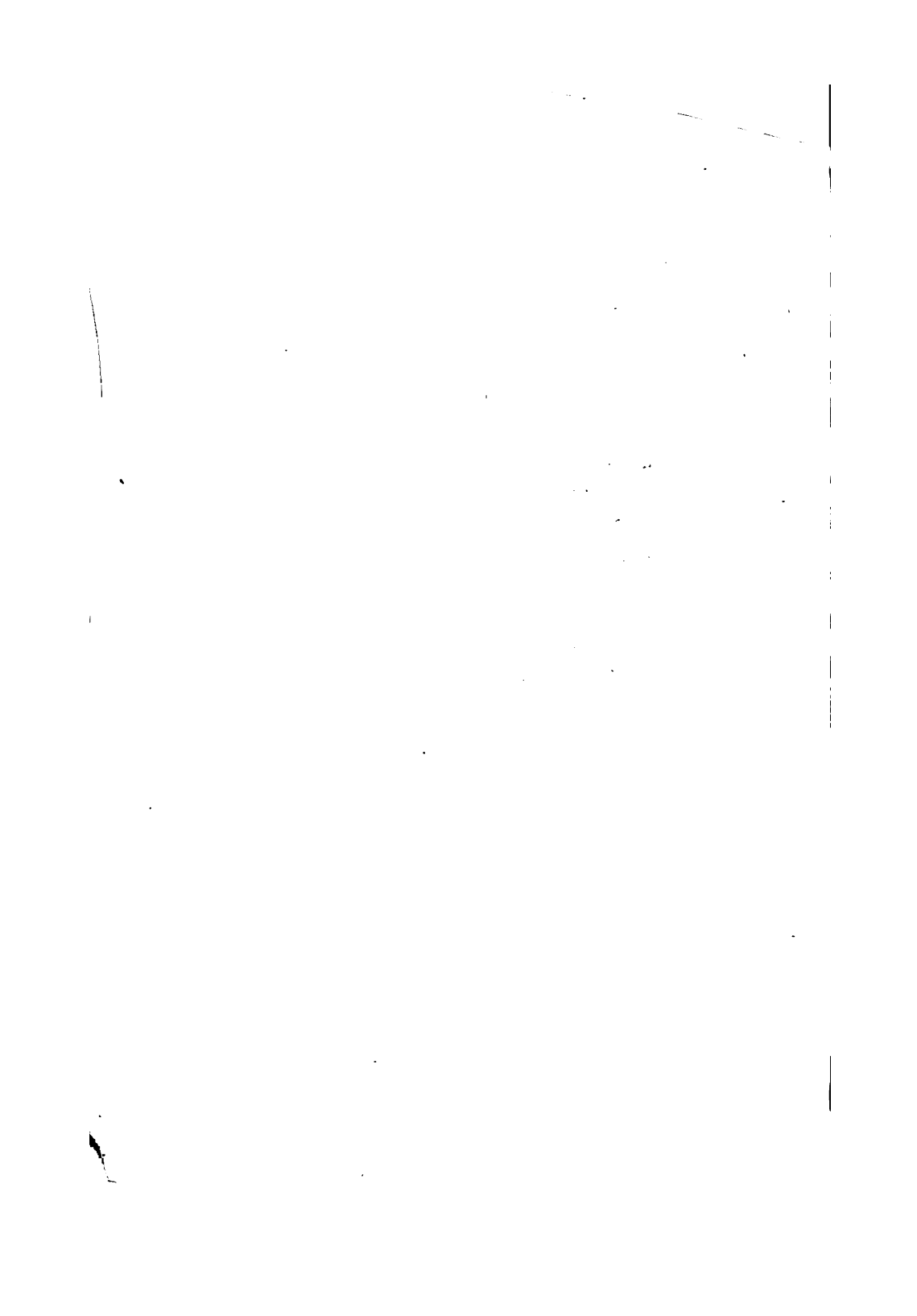
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BETWEEN TWO LOVES.

BETWEEN TWO LOVES

A Novel.

BY

ROBERT J. GRIFFITHS, LL.D.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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BETWEEN TWO LOVES.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOWS IN ISABEL GREENWOOD'S LIFE.

ISABEL did not feel John's departure so much as that young gentleman might have wished. She had a shrewd suspicion that the somewhat romantic circumstances under which their acquaintanceship was formed had excited his imagination, and she was not far wrong when she formed the opinion that the weak point in his character was a tendency to form hasty attachments without duly considering the consequences.

She had heard of John Raymond, even before their first casual encounter at Saltleigh, from a source which we need not here name. She was curious to know something of a young man who had risen so rapidly in his

employer's esteem, and who was likely, at no very distant period, to be a rich and prosperous man.

The opinion that she formed was, in a great measure, a just one. She believed him to be endued with much natural ability, and an intelligence above the ordinary kind, but she saw that he was becoming too greatly absorbed in the pursuit of wealth, and in the advancement of his own interests. Herself a girl of strong religious convictions, she had striven to inculcate her views upon this young man, whom she considered liable to be led astray ; but her interest in John went no further—there was no trace as yet of any personal feeling towards him.

Isabel Greenwood's life had not, as we have seen, been a happy one. When, through her father's brutality, she was compelled to leave her home, she obtained a situation as milliner in a fashionable establishment in Lord Street, and there she remained in comparative peace and comfort for about two years.

A few nights after John's departure she was walking along the street for her evening

walk, when she encountered her mother, who appeared to be in deep distress.

"What is the matter, mother, dear?" Isabel asked, taking the arm of the poor, shabbily-dressed woman, and leading her away from the thoroughfare, in order that their conversation might not be interrupted.

"Your father has been like a savage, Isabel," she sobbed; "he has been raving like a madman, and threatened to kill me, and I am sure he will do so at last."

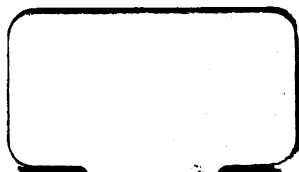
"When did this take place, mother?" asked the girl, with heightened colour and flashing eyes. All her affection for this man had been crushed out years ago.

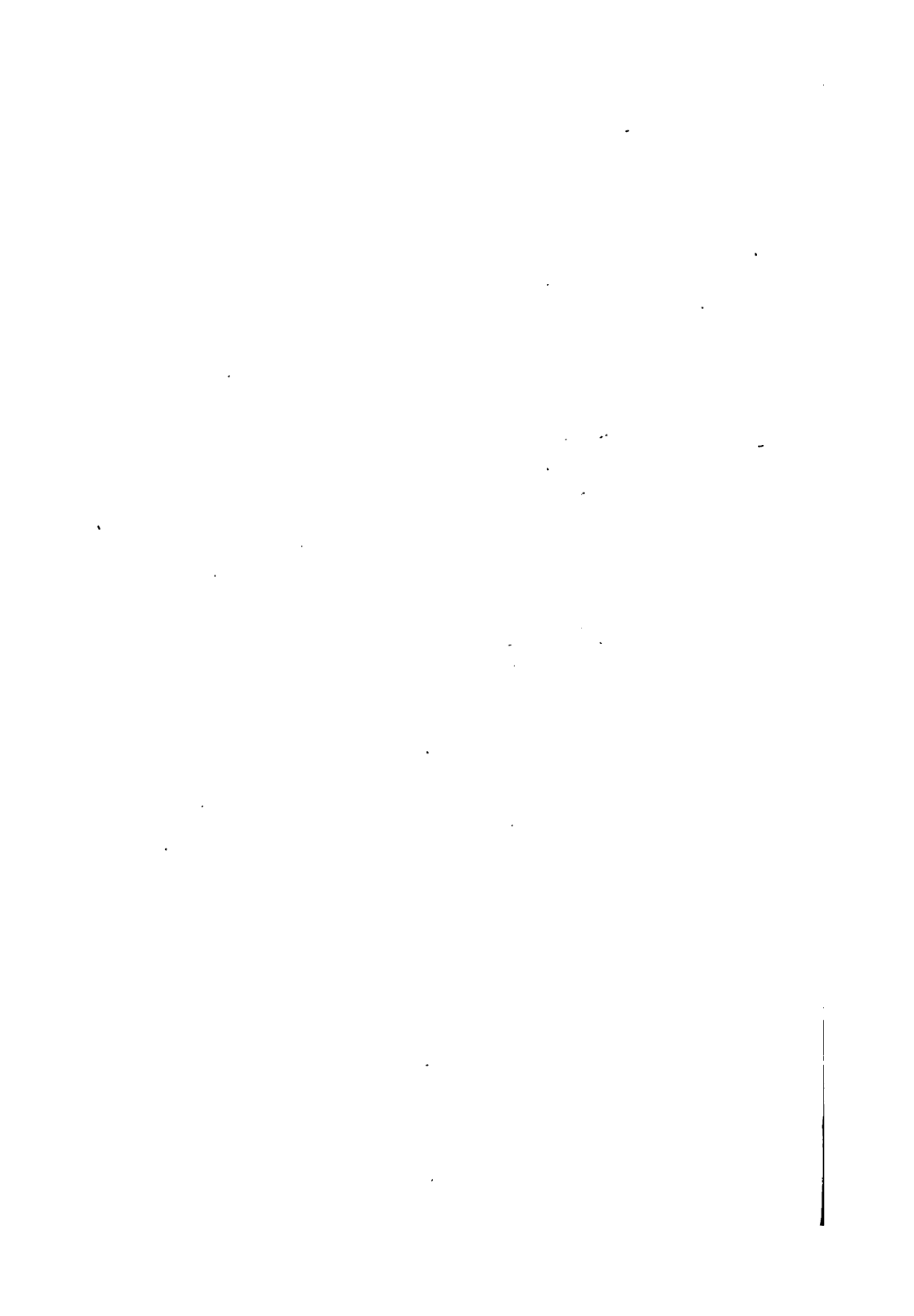
"He has been going on dreadfully the whole week," was the tearful answer, "and to-night he was worse than ever. I could not remain in the house with him, and came away."

"You ought never to go back to him, mother," said Isabel, more calmly. "I am afraid that in one of his mad tempers he will injure you, and it is far better for you to leave him now than after the harm has been done."

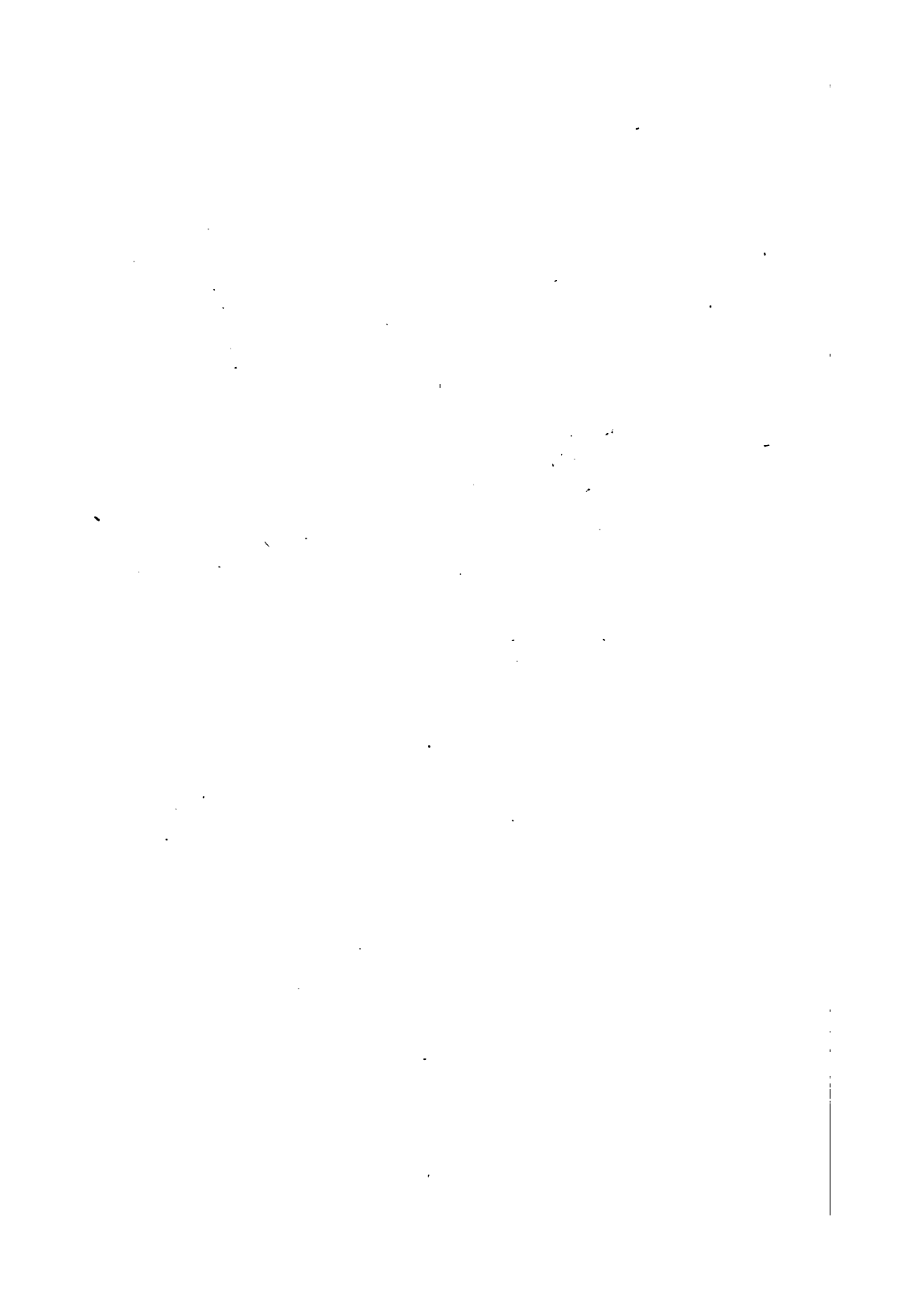


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BETWEEN TWO LOVES.



BETWEEN TWO LOVES.

health, and his eyes were bloodshot, and his features haggard and careworn. He was but a young man, and his fair, curly hair descended beneath the shabby hat which was upon his head. His hand shook a little also, and it was evident that he was a man who had lived a life of utter and reckless dissipation.

Isabel was about to direct him to another portion of the establishment, when their eyes met, and both exclaimed almost simultaneously—

“Isabel!”

“Edward!”

Isabel had found her brother, but how grievously changed!

The reader has met him before—it was Hewitt, the engineer. Through all the changes that time and dissipation had effected, she could still trace some resemblance to the handsome, bright-faced boy she remembered so well. Neither of them spoke for a few moments—their hearts were too full for words. Isabel was the first who broke the silence.

“Oh, Edward, where have you been?” she

asked, in a reproachful tone ; " and why did you not write to us during the years of your absence ?"

" I could not write," he answered, fiercely, " when I thought that you were staying with that brute of a father, and of course I did not know until now that you had left him."

" Mother has left him, too," she said, in a low voice. " She is staying with me now."

" Mother left him !" he exclaimed, in astonishment. " Why, he is alone, then ?"

" Quite alone," replied Isabel, " and it is best so."

They could not converse much longer there, and Isabel asked her brother to meet her that evening, which he readily consented to do. He was pleased to find his beautiful sister—pleased to find that she was earning her own livelihood, and was not dependent upon the man whom she called father. He resolutely abstained from drink, and in the evening presented himself, perfectly sober and respectably attired.

" You must come home with me, Edward,"

said Isabel, persuasively. "Mother has been unwell for some time past, and she will be so glad to see you."

"I have no objection," he said, rather indifferently, "so long as that interesting father of mine is not there. Have you seen him lately?"

"No," replied Isabel, quite alarmed at the bare idea.

"I have," he said, with a derisive laugh, "and he appears to be as great a scoundrel as ever. I should very much like to pay him off for his treatment of you and myself."

"Leave him alone, Edward," she said, gravely; "his own conscience will punish him. But you have not yet told me what you are doing."

"Oh, I am a civil engineer," he said, with an awkward laugh—"a civil engineer, without practice. My name is Hewitt now."

"And mine is Greenwood," she said, laughing merrily. "I think I have chosen the prettiest name."

"All names are pretty much alike," he replied, gloomily.

"Edward," said his sister, taking his arm, and looking up into his face very earnestly, "I am afraid you have formed bad habits, and that you are wasting your strength in drink. Is it not so?"

"Yes," he answered, very humbly. "My life has been a wild and wayward one since I left home. I succeeded at first in my profession, and would have made a handsome income if drink had not tempted and ruined me. I am a lost and degraded man now, Isabel."

"Not so, my brother," she answered, softly and tenderly; "no one is lost who is sorry for his faults."

"But I am not sorry, Isabel," he said, mournfully. "When brandy is placed before me, I cannot resist the temptation. It withers my soul, and scorches my brain; but I must drink it."

"Do not talk so recklessly, Edward," she said, gravely; "no one *must* do that which he believes to be hurtful to him."

"I cannot resist it, Isabel," he said, in the same mournful manner. "It has blighted

my prospects, and utterly ruined my life ; but it holds me faster than any iron fetters that were ever forged."

"We will speak of this again, Edward, dear," she said, as they paused before the door of the house. "Mother must not know of this—it would be her death."

The meeting between mother and son was an affecting one. She was too ill and feeble to notice the alteration in his manner, but he, on his part, was greatly shocked to find the ravages time and ill-treatment had wrought in her. When the first emotion was over, they sat down to supper—the first rational meal Edward had enjoyed for some time—and spoke calmly of their hopes and prospects.

"And so you are a civil engineer, my boy?" the old lady said, in that rambling, slightly incoherent manner common amongst old people. "It is a good profession, and you must be making a mint of money—quite a heap. Isabel wants a new dress badly, Edward, and I want so many things. Where is your father now?"

"How should I know, mother?" he asked, flushing up to his ears as he listened to her rambling words. "I know nothing about him, except that I have seen him once or twice."

"Seen him once or twice!" echoed the old lady in a nervous, frightened manner. "Did he not compel you to go home with him? Didn't he ask you about us?"

"I fancy he would never recognize me," replied Edward, with a grim laugh; "we have not been so intimate of late years, you know, mother."

"Where do you reside, Edward?" asked Isabel during a slight pause in the conversation.

"In lodgings, anywhere and everywhere," he replied, with another bitter laugh; "my movements are rather uncertain. Just now I am in Islington."

Isabel feared lest he might make some remarks which would reveal his habits and mode of life to his mother, and accordingly she rose and put away the supper things.

"It is time for mother to go to rest," she

said, in her usual firm, decisive manner, "and you must go now, Edward. I want you to walk with me down to business in the morning, for I have many things to say to you."

"When shall you be ready to start?" he asked, taking his hat.

"At half-past seven," she replied; "and be punctual for once. You will have to get up a little earlier than usual, but it will do you all the good in the world."

He promised to be there at the time appointed, and then went away. Isabel assisted her mother to retire to rest, and then returned to the sitting-room, and sat down before the fire.

The weather was warm enough, but Isabel loved to gaze into the glowing depths of the burning coals when she was meditating seriously. With her hands clasped on her knees, she was thinking of the shadows that lay so thickly and cast so deep a gloom upon her path. The young, fair face wore an expression of hopeless weariness now, as if she longed to lay down her heavy burden and rest for ever. Her father had driven her away

from home, her mother was dependent upon her exertions, and now her only brother was, she feared, a confirmed drunkard. Her cross was indeed very heavy and hard to bear, and she half-wished that she could close her eyes that evening and never open them again. Life had been nothing to her but a long trial, and a very painful pilgrimage, and although she maintained a brave, hopeful appearance to the eyes of all around her, there were depths, nevertheless, in her own heart where there was nothing but despondency and weariness.

A remark she had made to John in the Gardens came into her mind when she felt most miserable.

"If everybody did their duty just where they are," she had said, "the world would be very much happier."

The thought comforted her, and she rose from her seat, putting away her chair.

"My lot happens to be among troubles and trials," she said, more hopefully; "but I will do my duty, and leave the consequences to Providence. My chief object now must be, if possible, to reclaim my brother."

He was at the door next morning exactly at the appointed time. He seemed more haggard and blear-eyed than on the previous evening, and Isabel rightly concluded that he had been drinking. The truth was that he was filled with venom when he witnessed the peaceful home his sister had made for herself, and he thought how unselfish and useful her life was, whilst his was a curse to himself and to every one connected with him. The thought maddened him, and, to drown the remorse that filled his soul, he drank long and deeply. He did not retire to rest at all, so that it was not to be wondered at that he looked haggard and miserable in the bright soft light of the morning sun.

"You have been drinking again, Edward," she said, taking his arm. She did not hesitate to acknowledge this broken-down reprobate as her brother before the face of the whole world. The deeper was his sin, the greater was her love and compassion for him.

"I cannot help it, Isabel," he said, humbly. "I felt so miserable last night that I could not resist taking a little brandy."

"I am afraid you took a great deal," she responded, gravely; "and it was very foolish to take it merely because you felt miserable. What if every one in the world who feels miserable took brandy to drown his care! And you know very well, Edward, that it is brandy that made you miserable."

"I know that, of course," he replied, moodily; "but I can't shake it off, Isabel. It is really no use trying; it will cling to me to the grave."

"Have you ever tried fairly, Edward?" she asked, earnestly. "You do not know what you can do until you have tried fairly, and if you fail then you will be none the worse."

"I have tried, Isabel," he protested, eagerly, "and failed. What can I do more?"

"You have made good resolutions, perhaps, and thought yourself strong enough to keep them, until you discovered your mistake," she answered. "That is not what I mean by trying to reform. I fancy you are living among a set of men whose habits are like your own. Is it not so?"

"Yes," he admitted, rather reluctantly.

"You must leave them, Edward," she said,

firmly, "and break all connection with them. Come to our house to stay, and set to work in earnest. Can you get anything to do?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, confidently, and in this he spoke the truth. There were many people who would employ him if he remained sober.

"Go back to your present lodgings, then, Edward," she said, "pay your bill, and bring away all your things. I will send up to my landlady to tell her to expect you. Will you do this?"

"I will," he answered, more earnestly than he had yet spoken—"I will make one more effort, my darling sister, to save myself."

His eyes were suffused with tears as he turned away, and Isabel commenced the duties of the day in a more hopeful spirit than she had deemed possible on the previous evening. As the day wore on, however, she became uneasy as to whether Edward had really gone to his new place of abode, and this feeling of uneasiness increased until she became really anxious and excited respecting him.

The moment that she was released from her

duties she hastened home, and the landlady met her at the door.

"Has my brother come?" she asked, eagerly.

"He has not, Miss," replied the woman, who had no idea of the pain her answer inflicted upon Isabel's heart.

"Surely he has sent a message, then?" she persisted, still clinging to the hope that something had prevented him from coming.

"No, Miss," was the reply, "he has sent nothing."

The disappointment was a grievous one, but Isabel bore it bravely. She greeted her mother with her usual tenderness, and did not mention Edward's intended coming. The old lady seemed to have forgotten her son's existence, for she made no allusion to him, and asked no questions concerning him. Her memory was in fact failing her, and she thought of but little that was not actually present before her.

Isabel was unusually grave and silent that night. She feared that her brother had been enticed by some of his evil companions, and that it would be a long time before he again made his appearance.

The next day seemed inexpressibly long and tedious to her. The weary hours seemed days, and time appeared to move with leaden wings. She glanced up with an eager, inquiring look as every new-comer entered the place, but she was doomed to be disappointed.

Her brother never came, and made no sign. The longest day must come to an end, and Isabel was released at last. She hurried homewards—not so hopefully, perhaps, as on the previous evening, but still with a faint conviction that he had come—and entered the house. She opened the door of her sitting-room, and beheld her brother sitting in deep conversation with her mother.

“Oh, Edward, I am so glad to see you,” she cried, joyfully, clasping him affectionately around the neck. “I was so disappointed last night.”

“I could not come last night, Isabel, dear,” he said, drawing her on his knee; “I had several things to do, and did not like to send you a message.”

“Never mind, Edward,” she replied, cheerfully; “we shall be all so happy now that

you are come. We shall be quite a family now."

He laughed at the idea, but another thought suddenly occurred to him.

"I must change my name," he said, "or else you must change yours. Which is it to be—Hewitt or Greenwood?"

"Greenwood is the prettier name," she said, with a smile, "and, as you have changed your whole course of life, you may as well change your name also."

"Very well; it is agreed," he said, with a smile. "I cannot get over that argument. It will be rather inconvenient at first, because most of the people who employ me will ask the reason. However, it is not of much consequence."

When Mrs. Greenwood had retired to rest, the brother and sister remained for a few minutes in earnest conversation.

"Why did you not come last night, Edward?" she asked.

"The fact is, I owed some money at my lodgings," he said, frankly, "and I had to work a little to raise it; that was the reason."

"I am glad that you are here, Edward," she said, tenderly, but gravely; "and now you must begin your new life. There is no more brandy for you, Edward, if you wish to save yourself. Be a man for once, my brother, and rise above this dreadful habit."

He promised faithfully, and then they parted for the night. He was up at an early hour next morning, and, when Isabel left the house, he was hard at work.

When she returned in the evening, the miserable man had left the house for a neighbouring tavern, and was helplessly intoxicated.

Alas! poor Isabel!

CHAPTER II.

THE MYNYDD-MAWR LEAD COMPANY (LIMITED.)

THE Mynydd-Mawr Lead Company (Limited) was a great and apparently successful fact. The directors consisted of a needy baronet, who generally stood in want of ready money, and who was consequently always ready to lend his name for a consideration—a knight, who received the honour in his capacity as mayor of a provincial town which her Majesty happened to visit, and who had subsequently failed in business and was reduced to poverty—a captain, who had once belonged to some imaginary navy, but whose sole occupation seemed to be the relating of apocryphal stories respecting the doughty deeds he had once performed—a solicitor, who happened to be chairman of two or three similar companies, and whose name therefore looked well in the prospectus—and a merchant of some standing in the town, who had been induced by Hewitt's

sanguine report to put faith in the concern, and whose name was the only really good one in the company.

Robson was extremely anxious to secure Mr. Hamilton as one of the directors. Randall had even waited upon him one day at The Elms, by appointment, to "lay the matter fully before him," as he remarked in his note. This was at the time when they were seeking one or two good names to add to the titled penniless nobodies already mentioned. Robson also thought that if Mr. Hamilton would sink a round sum of money in the speculation, it would be as good a way as any of depriving him of a small portion of his wealth.

Randall was shown into the merchant's study, where he always conducted his business affairs. The little man came in with a deferential smile and a very humble obeisance, as if he were in the presence of some extremely powerful and influential personage. Randall found that humility paid him well in the long run, and it was certainly cheap enough, he reflected.

Mr. Hamilton was seated before the table,

with a large file of papers before him which he had been examining. He received his visitor with his usual courtesy, and requested him to be seated. Randall felt somewhat at a loss how to commence this conversation. He had no idea that the sick man who once resided in his house was the brother of the wealthy merchant before him. Such a piece of information would have been a perfect god-send to him, but John had most scrupulously preserved this knowledge from him.

"I must apologise for intruding upon your time and patience," he said, in a smooth apologetic manner that long use had made him familiar with; "my only reason and excuse for doing so is the great desire felt by the directors of our company to have your name associated with theirs in this very promising enterprise."

"No apologies are necessary, Mr. Smith," the merchant replied briefly; "proceed to the matter you wish to explain."

Randall, thus encouraged, presented a glowing picture of the riches which were in store for the fortunate directors and share-

holders of the Mynydd-Mawr Lead Company (Limited), and asserted confidently that every one connected with the mine would, in a few years, be rolling in illimitable wealth. It was just this swaggering over-confident tone that caused Mr. Hamilton to dislike the whole business.

"Has the mine ever been worked before?" he asked, leaning back in his chair, and watching Randall keenly with half-closed eyes.

"No, it has not been really worked as yet," replied he, with a little confusion in his manner, which heightened the merchant's distrust. "The proprietor of the land opened it after discovering the vein, but found himself unable to carry it on, because of want of means. This company is now being formed to remedy this state of affairs."

"If I intended becoming a director," Mr. Hamilton remarked, still in the same posture, "I would run down to see the mine. It would be the wisest course, especially as I know nothing of this Mr. Hewitt. But to tell you the plain simple truth, I have no such intention."

"I am very sorry indeed to hear your decision," replied Randall, who was nevertheless rather glad of it, for he knew perfectly well that if the merchant went down and discovered the true state of things, he would make the real facts of the case public in Liverpool on his return—a course which would be extremely inconvenient to Randall and his colleague.

"I could not accept the distinction you offer me, although it has so many prospective advantages," continued Mr. Hamilton, with a slight touch of irony in his tone, which was, however, completely lost on his obtuse visitor, "and my decision is grounded upon several reasons. In the first place, I know nothing of lead-mining; in the next place, it appears to me that the evidence of the existence of lead, in this particular mine, is exceedingly slight; in the last place, I know nothing of the promoters of the scheme, except that one is an upright man, who understands just as much about mining as I do. I cannot, therefore embark in the enterprise at all."

Randall rose to go, and was about to wish the merchant good morning, when that gentleman spoke again.

"It seems to me," he said, quietly, "that I ought to recognise your name and address, Mr. Smith—Did not Mr. Raymond reside with you, and, subsequently, a sick friend of his?"

Randall would have been thankful if the earth had swallowed him just at that moment. He concluded that Mr. Hamilton knew of his treatment of the invalid in question, and also that John had acquainted the merchant with his manner of life.

"Yes, Mr. Raymond was with us for some time," he replied, striving to appear calm and unconcerned.

"Why did he leave?" asked the merchant; "for he told me that he had left, and he must have had a reason."

Randall was being pressed hard, but he would not give in just yet.

"It was owing to a little misunderstanding on his part," he replied, boldly. "I went to endeavour to conciliate him for any fancied offence we might have committed, and he treated me so offensively that I did not renew my visit."

"I am surprised to hear of this," replied

Mr. Hamilton, whose opinion of Randall was becoming lower and lower ; "because I have the greatest confidence in Mr. Raymond's good judgment. May I ask what was your occupation before you undertook the secretaryship of this company ?"

"I was a general agent," replied Randall, confusedly, for he fancied that Mr. Hamilton knew exactly what his occupation had been. He was mistaken, however, in this conjecture ; Mr. Hamilton was quite ignorant on the point.

"A general agent," said the merchant, sarcastically ; "then I am afraid your knowledge of mining is pretty much on a par with mine. I must wish you good morning, Mr. Smith."

Randall breathed freely again when he stood once more beneath the broad canopy of heaven. He was fully persuaded that the merchant knew of his secret history, and the thought made him actually tremble.

"I am getting my neck into the halter," he mused, ruefully, "and it is simply because I consented to help Robson in his designs against this man. I will have nothing more to do with the plot. It is all very well for

him, but my neck is in danger. I'm off the business, anyway."

He returned to town in this state of mind, and reported the failure of his mission to Robson, who was extremely angry at first, attributing the failure to Randall's want of diplomatic skill.

"You had better see him yourself, then," suggested that gentleman, maliciously; "you would, no doubt, be more successful."

"If the thing were at all possible, I would go," replied Robson, calmly; "but you know that it is quite out of the question. However, to make up the required number of directors, you must put my name down."

"Yours?" exclaimed Smith, in astonishment.

"Mine!" was the cool rejoinder; "with a little alteration. 'Archibald Smithson, Esq.,' will look well in the prospectus, and perhaps my presence on the board may calm your feelings a little."

And thus it happened that Mr. Robson became a director, and his satellite, Randall, the secretary, of the Mynydd-Mawr Lead

Company (Limited). The prospectus was a triumph of the printer's art, and Hewitt's report was prominent in all the glories of large type and red ink. The names of the directors, bankers, and solicitors were sufficiently impressive to calm the doubts of the most sceptical speculator on 'Change. The scheme attracted great attention, and, as Robson had anticipated, the shares were eagerly applied for.

The offices of the company were situated in the principal thoroughfare of the town. They were on the second floor of a large building entirely occupied with offices of first-class concerns, and, on the staircase, the words, "Mynydd-Mawr Lead Company (Limited)," stood out in bold relief. There were three handsomely furnished rooms occupied by the company. In the outer room two clerks were stationed, who received visitors, and communicated their names to the secretary in the next apartment.

The secretary himself was in highly comfortable quarters. The sun's rays were intercepted by costly curtains and heavy Venetian

blinds, the floor was covered by a soft carpet, into which the foot sank at every step, and the mantelpiece was surmounted by a pier-glass with a massive gilt frame. The chairs were all richly cushioned, and some choice pictures were suspended from the walls. Mr. Randall Smith was in high feather. The world was smiling upon him just now, and he was disposed to enjoy this sunshine of fortune so long as it lasted. His manners were changed also. He had grown to be somewhat dictatorial and haughty, and even to Mr. Robson he was sometimes sharp and arrogant. His head was too weak to remain long upon the giddy pinnacle where he was now poised, although he appeared to feel fully convinced that the present highly agreeable state of affairs was to last for ever.

The third room was that set apart for the use of the directors, and this was still more richly furnished. The most costly furniture had been procured—on credit—and every effort was made to impart an air of solidity and wealth to the whole concern.

The shares were eagerly taken up. People were ready to support almost anything in the shape of a limited liability company; and one that was presented to the public with such excellent prospects, and with so goodly an array of names on the board of directors, was not likely to want support. The thousand shares were speedily allotted, and two calls were duly made in order that the mine might be set at work.

It was necessary to send an engineer down to South Wales in order that the necessary steps might be taken for the re-opening of the mine, and to employ a few miners.

Robson sent for Hewitt, but nothing could be heard of him. He had completely disappeared from his old haunts, and his former friends had completely lost sight of him. This was vexatious, for he alone could be safely trusted with the task. If another engineer were sent down, he might discover the rottenness of the speculation, and make it known among the shareholders.

The worthy couple, however, succeeded in obtaining the services of a man who had been

once the "captain" of a mine, but who knew little, if anything, respecting the proper management of mining operations. He was sent down to the mine with instructions to re-open it, and to employ half-a-dozen miners to excavate it.

The shareholders were then informed, with a grand flourish of trumpets, that "the directors had adopted the most energetic measures in order to reach the ore as soon as possible."

Mr. Hamilton saw this circular, and sent for his manager. Mr. Grimson came in with his customary smile and gliding tread.

"What do you think of this new company, Mr. Grimson?" asked the merchant, abruptly. "Have you any shares in it?"

"Certainly not, sir," was the reply. "Even if I had money at hand to invest—which I have not—I doubt whether I should put it into any lead mine in the market."

"Do you think it an untrustworthy company?" demanded Mr. Hamilton. "You are more in town than I am, and mingle more with people likely to take an interest in a

company of this kind. What is the general feeling with regard to it?"

"People seem to think that it will pay," said the manager, deliberately; "the shares are much higher than anyone anticipated a month ago. Do you feel inclined to take any?"

"Certainly not—most certainly not," replied the merchant, quickly; "I am only very curious on the point, because the secretary waited on me some time ago and asked me to become a director, but I refused."

"Why did you refuse?" asked Mr. Grimson, when the merchant paused.

"Simply because I was not satisfied that the mine contained much lead," was the reply. "It seemed to me to rest entirely upon the report of the engineer—a man of whom I never heard, and who perhaps knew nothing of mining."

"I have heard the engineer spoken of as a very clever man," said the manager, "a little given to drink, but one of the cleverest engineers in town. I think that, so far as his knowledge went, his report was thoroughly conscientious."

"That may be," replied the merchant, "but I am afraid he knows but little about it. However, as I am not a shareholder, it does not concern me. I spoke to you lest you might be induced to take shares. I have private reasons of my own for believing it to be a swindle."

In his own room, the manager pondered long and seriously as to what these private reasons might be; but, although he had an idea as to what the merchant referred to, he was unable to understand the course which Mr. Hamilton had adopted.

"Why should he mention it to me?" he asked himself; "and how absurd to suppose that *I* had money in it! I wonder if he ever speculated a shilling in limited liability companies? He does not seem the sort of man for speculation."

While Mr. Hamilton was thus depreciating the Mynydd-Mawr Lead Company (Limited), the secretary of that gigantic undertaking was perusing a report of the operations at the mine, which he had just received from the "captain," and, judging by the beaming smile

that was upon his fat, round face, the letter was a highly-satisfactory document. The fact was that when the "captain" arrived on the scene of his future operations, he quickly discovered that the directors of the company were either great fools or knaves. He inclined to the latter opinion, and he, therefore, determined to secure as much of the pickings from the shareholders as he possibly could. Instead of engaging six men as he had been directed to do, he secured the services of two mere labourers for a week, and employed them to remove the timber which was placed on the mouth of the mine, and in erecting an engine-shed of wood near the shaft. This done, he drew up a long "report," in which he stated that a dozen men were at work in the mine, and that in a short time it would be in full working order. He entered into the minutest details, and evinced a fertility of imagination that was highly creditable to him. The chief portion of his time was spent in the kitchen of the village ale-house, but he made a point of repairing to the mine for an hour every day with conscientious punctuality, and dropping

half a dozen pebbles down into the water below. When this daily operation was over, the captain returned with a quiet conscience to enjoy the delights of the tap-room.

Mr. Robson called in the office one day, and was immediately shown into the secretary's room. That gentleman produced a bottle of old port and a plate of biscuits, with which they proceeded to regale themselves.

"How long has the company been on foot, Randall?" asked the director.

"Nearly three months," replied the secretary, munching a biscuit.

"Any lead found yet?" asked Mr. Robson, playfully.

"Lots!" replied Mr. Smith, solemnly; "in fact, we don't know what to do with it."

"How do you dispose of it, then?" asked the other, in the same playful manner.

"Throw it back into the mine," replied Randall; "the company is too rich to need any more money."

"To be serious, Randall," said Mr. Robson, resuming his usual calm, business-like tone of

voice, "there must be a meeting of the shareholders at the end of the three months."

"You don't mean it?" exclaimed Randall, greatly alarmed. "A meeting of shareholders! Good gracious!"

"I see nothing very alarming in the prospect," said the other, with a laugh; "you must prepare a smooth, plausible statement, and tell them that we are raising a large quantity of lead."

"They will know it has not been in the market," objected Randall, nervously.

"It has been disposed of by private arrangement," replied Robson, coolly, "and a large sum of money will be placed to our credit in a few days."

"Anything more that I am to say?" asked Randall, who felt it to be the safest course to follow Robson's advice implicitly.

"Promise them a large dividend at the year's end," said the astute director, "and wind up by announcing a call for another £1 a share, which will be the last call for some time."

"I suppose it will be really the last," remarked Randall, significantly.

“Yes ; it is time to close the game,” said Robson, in the same tone of voice that he would have employed in speaking of a game of chess. “You must take a trip for your health in a short time, Randall ; the sooner you send Mrs. S. and the furniture away, the better for you.”

“Why should I send her away ?” demanded Randall, with surprise.

“Because it is very probable that you will have everything in the house smashed by an infuriated mob of shareholders some fine morning,” replied Robson, with an aggravating smile.

The Mynydd-Mawr Lead Company (Limited) was clearly about to collapse.

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN AT BAY.

THE Elms was very peaceful and calm in those long summer days. Now that John was away, and Mr. Grimson an unwelcome guest, there were no visitors to disturb the solemn hush that seemed to settle upon the quaint old mansion. Louisa had ample time to think of the strong, stalwart youth so far away across the waste of waters, and, in the romantic solitude, her thoughts dwelt so constantly upon him, that he became to her imagination the personification of everything that is good and noble in man.

It was a pity that her hands and her thoughts were not usefully occupied, but, being naturally of a dependent turn of mind—more prone to cling to others than to act for herself, and being left during her childhood to spend her time just as she pleased, this idle, dreaming, mood grew upon her. Day by day, she

invested her hero with some new virtue, until, as the weeks and months went by, he became a splendid combination of mental and physical gifts.

Mrs. Hamilton's health was delicate during that summer, and Louisa was alone for hours together every day. Then she would ramble through the woods, and sit dreaming by the rippling brooklet, imagining that she heard the fairies sigh in the crystal stream. She would weave the wild flowers into curious wreaths, and place them upon her head, wondering within herself what her hero would say if he saw her thus adorned. Sometimes she would stand at her chamber window, and gaze upon the smooth, silvery breast of the Mersey, and wonder how long *he* would be before he sailed up the noble river. It was a dreamy, romantic season, such as all have experienced at some period in their lives, and upon which we look back with tender memories through the mist of intervening years.

Mrs. Hamilton's life during this bright summer season was not a romantic one. She had been miserable and nervous since that

night upon which she first beheld the new manager. The storm of pent-up passion and anguish of soul had burst in its full fury since then, and the recollections which he had conjured up of her old life were full of pain to her. She dreaded and hated this cool, resolute, mocking fiend—hated him because she dreaded him—and felt herself powerless to struggle against an adversary so skilful and determined as she believed him to be.

The merchant was at breakfast one morning, and Louisa alone appeared, Mrs. Hamilton being feverish and weary. Louisa was unusually thoughtful that morning. She had dreamt about John, and felt unusually anxious to learn something about him.

“Do you ever hear from Mr. Raymond, papa?” she said, raising her cup to conceal a blush which she could not prevent.

“Of course I do, my dear,” replied her father, without looking up from his paper.

“Is he doing your business well, papa?” she asked, again.

“Very well, indeed, my dear,” replied the merchant, complacently; “he has bought

a great quantity of cotton, and it is on its way to England now."

"The cotton, or the buyer of it?" asked his daughter.

"The cotton, of course," he said. "What foolish questions you ask, Louisa."

"I see nothing foolish in supposing him to be on his way home," she replied, indignantly, "if he has bought all the cotton you want."

"Yes, he has bought all the cotton I want," answered her father; "and I believe he will be on his way home soon."

Louisa was partly satisfied with this intelligence, and went to Mrs. Hamilton's room to tell her the news—if such it was—that Mr. Raymond was on his way home. That lady seemed unusually pale, and her eyes glowed with a fierce, unnatural blaze, which heightened her magnificent beauty, and lent a strange, peculiar fascination to her proud, queenly face. Louisa sat at her feet, on a stool, and gazed up silently into the beautiful features where suffering was so plainly depicted.

"What would you do, mamma," she asked, at length, "if you were very fond of some-

body that was much poorer than you, and whom you were ever so much in love with?"

"If he loved me, whatever his worldly position might be, I would marry him," she replied, passing her hand caressingly through Louisa's soft, silky tresses. "But some men are too proud to accept a wife richer than themselves."

"Are they not very foolish, mamma?" asked Louisa, opening her eyes in wonder.

"I do not think them foolish, my child?" was the grave reply; "but I would consider a woman to be more than foolish if she married a man richer than herself, if she did not really love him."

"Why, mamma?" asked Louisa, whose little head began to be confused with an argument of this kind.

"Because she would be selling herself to him," was the passionate reply: "she would be sacrificing her honour, independence, and liberty for the sake of obtaining gold. It is fearful to contemplate such a thing," she said, with an involuntary shudder.

"Papa was much richer than you were, was

he not, mamma ?" asked Louisa, with a puzzled look.

"Much richer, dear," answered Mrs. Hamilton, evasively ; "but I said that it ought not to be done unless the woman really loved her husband."

"Then you must have loved papa very much," concluded Louisa. "I love him, too ; but, then, I love somebody ever so much more."

"Who is it, dear ?" asked Mrs. Hamilton, who, however, knew perfectly well the confession that was coming. "Is it Mr. Raymond?"

"Yes, mamma ; but how did you guess ?" asked Louisa, with great surprise.

"It was not very difficult to guess, dear," replied her step-mother ; "but I am afraid Mr. Hamilton will not consent."

It was always *Mr. Hamilton*. She could not regard him as her husband, even when speaking of him to others.

"I don't care if he refuses to give his consent," cried Louisa, impetuously ; "we can run off, you know, and live in a cottage somewhere ; that would be so nice."

"How would you live in a cottage?" asked Mrs. Hamilton, smiling, notwithstanding the acute pain she was enduring; "you must have something to live upon?"

"Oh, Mr. Raymond will come home rich, of course," she said, with a complacent nod, as if she had maturely considered the whole question; "and then, you know, we would write papa a nice, perfumed letter, and ask his forgiveness, and he would send the carriage for us, and we should be all so happy."

Mrs. Hamilton laughed at this little programme, which Louisa had evidently planned out with much care.

"Well, I hope your scheme will be successful," she said; "but now you must run away and leave me. My head aches badly."

Louisa obeyed, and went out into the garden to water her flowers, and whilst she was thus occupied, her father's returning brougham passed by, and, glancing up, she saw Mr. Grimson seated in it.

"That horrid man!" she exclaimed, putting down the watering-can, and clenching her little hand in the direction of the retiring carriage.

"I wonder what brings him here again? I declare I won't go near the house until he goes away. I hope he won't be long."

Mr. Hamilton had forgotten a large sum of money which he required in town that day, and on mentioning the matter to Mr. Grimson, that gentleman immediately offered to fetch the bag. Mr. Hamilton was rather surprised, for this was a duty that belonged to the clerks, but he could not well refuse to allow him to go. He was, therefore, once more at The Elms.

He requested to see Mrs. Hamilton, but was informed that she was unwell and could see no one. He then directed the servant to conduct him to Mr. Hamilton's study, where the money was found ready to be conveyed to town. He expressed his intention of writing a note to Mrs. Hamilton, and the servant accordingly brought him pens, ink, and paper.

He wrote a few words, enclosed the sheet of paper in an envelope, and gave it to the servant, who carried it to Mrs. Hamilton. She shivered as she took the paper and tore open the envelope, and her face became whiter

still as she read the few significant words traced upon the paper.

"If you refuse to see me, Charlotte," it said, "I will return to the city, and tell your husband all."

She was very pale, but the lines of her mouth were tightly drawn, and her eyes had a dangerous expression that boded no good to this audacious man who dared to *threaten* her.

"Show the gentleman in," she said to the servant, and then she sat mustering up all her strength for the struggle that she knew was at hand.

She heard a door opening and closing, and then a heavy footstep on the staircase. The next moment the manager entered the room.

She commenced the fight, hoping to gain an advantage over him by showing her determination not to give way.

"I presume you imagine that you are doing a very brave and very honourable action in sending me a note like this," she said, sarcastically, at the same time holding it up to his gaze; "are you aware that if I sent this to my husband, you would be dismissed?"

"I know perfectly well that you will never send it to your husband," he replied, coolly; "because if you did so, there would be an unpleasant disclosure of things which you would much prefer to keep secret from him."

"I am rather at a loss to understand your meaning," she said, in the same tone as before.

"If you mean to say," he replied boldly, "that you are not the Charlotte Fitzroy I knew some years ago, then I have to remark that I can produce a copy of the marriage certificate of John Hamilton and Charlotte Fitzroy. Perhaps those would be sufficient evidence."

"I do not deny it," she said, more humbly, for she saw that he had spared no pains in tracking her, "but I wish to know what is your object in thus forcing an interview upon me."

"I will tell you presently," he replied, perceiving the change in her manner; "what I wish to impress upon you now, is the fact that you are in my power *Mrs. Hamilton*," laying strong emphasis upon the concluding words.

"I do not acknowledge it," she said, boldly,

"I am no more in your power than you are in mine. As I said before, you would be at once dismissed if my husband knew of this note and of these threats."

"Your husband might dispense with others beside his manager," was the significant reply.

"Even if he did so," she replied, "it would only be a question as to whether separation from my husband was preferable to remaining with him, the slave and tool of his manager."

He winced slightly, and she saw her advantage.

"If you wish to drive me to extremities," she continued, rapidly, "you may do so, but you may be sure that I will endure anything rather than acknowledge your fancied hold upon me."

"It is not a 'fancied hold,'" he replied, calmly, "it is a real one, and you are fully aware of it. You would endure a great deal before you would consent to renounce this ease and luxury in order to return to your affectionate father's shop—the father who

made the bargain for you with the rich fool who is your husband."

"I tell you, man," she exclaimed, fiercely, "that I would endure anything rather than be your slave. While I have hands to work with, there is no necessity for me to return to my father. You forget also that my husband would make me an allowance."

"I forget nothing," he replied, "it is you that forget strangely your position; your husband's love would turn to bitter hate, and he would throw you off completely and for ever. You would receive no allowance from him. His heart and his purse would be closed against you for ever."

"Even in that case," she said, quietly, "I have the law to protect me. I could compel him to make me an allowance. Even regarding it from your sordid point of view."

"The law!" he cried, with a bitter laugh; "you would never parade your domestic troubles before a sympathizing public, through the medium of a court of law. I know you too well, Charlotte."

"You do not know me yet, if you imagine

that I will submit to such insult," she said, fiercely. "I will make no terms with you. I knew, of old, that you respect nothing, either human or divine."

"I respect nothing," he said, in a softer tone than he had hitherto made use of; "nothing but what I love; and, Charlotte, I have always loved you. Through the long years of youth and manhood I have loved you with a stronger and deeper love than man ever gave a woman before. Even now, Charlotte, in your anger and indignation, I never loved you more deeply."

"I will not listen to such language," she said, rising, and standing before him in her magnificent beauty, whilst her eyes flashed fire, and she seemed a-blaze with wrath; "double-dyed traitor, betrayer of every one who reposed trust in you, do you dream for a moment to subdue me with such false, honeyed words?"

"Listen, then," he said, with his old mocking smile; "since you will not listen to reason, let me tell you the alternative. Your husband will be a ruined man in a few months,

even though his ruin is not accomplished by me ; your father will be in a debtor's prison, your only sister will be turned adrift upon the world, and this wealth, for which you have struggled so long, and sinned, too, will be torn from you."

She was sitting again, and her head had drooped upon her hands, whilst hot scalding tears were falling fast. She knew this bold dangerous man, and she knew that he would hesitate at nothing in order to accomplish his purpose.

"Are you happy here?" he continued, more gently, "has your sacrifice and mad ambition given you happiness? Do you not remember the old time, which seems so long ago, when you served in your father's shop, and were poor and hard-worked? Were not those days far happier than these you spend here in idle ease?"

"They were—they were!" she moaned, piteously.

"I told you I understood you thoroughly, Charlotte, and I will prove it," he continued; "you are longing to escape from this gilded

bondage—longing to be free and independent once more, without the bitterness of knowing that every day you are living on the price of your own soul and body.”

He was right, and the girl-woman, who was weeping before him, felt that he was depicting the thoughts of her inmost soul. Still she loathed and detested this man, who understood her so well, and seemed determined to make use of his knowledge. She longed to be free—to breathe once more the pure air of perfect liberty ; but she would not, could not, purchase this freedom by sinning more deeply than she had ever done before. American slavery was better than that. Her soul revolted at the very thought of such a step.

“ There are lands,” continued the tempter, “ where you would forget the misery of the last few years—where your life would be an uninterrupted season of joy. Why should you hesitate ? Whatever my faults may be, I have never sinned against you. I have always been loyal to you, even when you scorned and loathed me. Am I never to have my reward ? ”

"Never!" she said, rising again, and confronting him. "I loathe and despise you still, and shall always do so. I have no other answer to make to you."

She was sorely pressed, and in grievous trouble, but she was desperate now. She would make no terms with this man; he might ruin her husband, and blight her life, but she would cling to her honour in spite of him. She preferred poverty infinitely more than disgrace.

"Very well, if that be your decision," he said, calmly, although he was grievously disappointed, fully expecting that she would bend beneath his iron will. "What course I shall take I do not yet know, whether to acquaint your husband with the secret that would so fatally injure you, or to pursue the other course I have pointed out."

"I care not," she replied, desperately. "Do as you will; I can make no terms, no compromise with you."

"I will see you again," he said, as he rose to go; "in calmer moments you will see the folly of this conduct, and find that it will be wise not to drive me too far."

"Never!" she almost screamed. "Never! Do your utmost; I care not. There shall be no peace between us."

He was gone; and then the passionate woman flung herself upon the ground, and sobbed aloud in her agony. She realized the horror of her position, placed at the mercy of a man who knew no mercy, and she dreaded lest in some weak moment she might yield to the fearful temptation he had placed before her. She did not know until that moment of supreme anguish how dear this life, against which she had murmured so long, was to her. She never thought of her husband, nor of the sorrow she might bring upon him; but Louisa, and all the other associations of her sweet home-life had entwined themselves around her heart, and the shock that the severance of these ties would be to her, would be more than she could endure. She never loved The Elms and its peaceful calm as she did at that moment, when she was in danger of losing them for ever.

She became calmer in a short time, and prepared to meet Louisa, who came tripping

in in a few minutes. The wild storm of passion that had swept over Mrs. Hamilton's soul had passed away, leaving but few outward traces. Only a great nameless horror remained behind—a dread that she could not shake off, and it clung to her for many a weary month.

The great struggle and crisis of her life had come, and she dared not to think what the end might be.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMING STRUGGLE.

JOHN RAYMOND'S eyes were dim with tears as the last faint outline of the Irish coast sank beneath the horizon, and he became, for the first time, fully conscious of his complete separation from England, and the loved ones it contained.

Day after day he paced the deck, and gazed wistfully homewards across the great wilderness of waters, but there was nothing to relieve the monotony of his daily life. Occasionally a ship was descried at a distance, but usually there was nothing to contemplate but the wild billows of the great mysterious ocean, among which that huge steamer appeared so frail and small.

They were about eleven days on the passage, and then arrived at Boston, where John went on shore and determined to commence operations there. He had letters of intro-

duction to some wealthy cotton brokers and merchants, and he hastened to present one of these that day. He took up his temporary quarters in Tremont Street, and from thence sallied forth with his letter of introduction. The gentleman to whom it was addressed was a Mr. Sunter, and he had been engaged in the English trade for a great many years, during most of which he had been connected with Mr. Hamilton. He resided in a handsome villa, some three miles from the town, and his establishment was one of the most costly and perfect near the city of Boston. He was married and had three daughters, the youngest of whom was eighteen, the eldest being on the point of marriage with a young lawyer of considerable reputation.

The house was situated in the midst of a small wood, just as *The Elms* was at home, but the comparison went no further. Mr. Sunter's house was built of white-polished stone, and every detail was modern and new. Even the furniture was of a handsome unsubstantial character that contrasted unfavourably with the solid old oak of *The Elms*.

John's reception by the merchant was a most cordial one.

"Mr. Hamilton advised me some weeks ago that he intended sending you," he said pleasantly, "and I partly expected you with the last steamer."

"Is there a great demand for cotton?" asked John, upon whose mind the success or failure of his mission weighed heavily.

"The demand, of course, is very great, but not so great as it really would be if people foresaw the great scarcity that must prevail in another year or so," replied the merchant.

"You think, then, that the war will last a whole year?" said John.

"Yes, and more than a year," replied Mr. Sunter seriously; "we are entering upon a struggle of which I do not see the end."

"I do not wish to see the beginning of the strife," remarked John; "and, therefore, the sooner my business is transacted the better. How much of the cotton that I want can you get for me, Mr. Sunter?"

They entered into business details, and John found that the amount of material

actually in Mr. Sunter's hands was not great, but he undertook to procure twenty thousand bales in a few weeks. He also advised John to proceed to Charleston, where he would find an immense amount ready to be shipped, and he promised him letters to his correspondent there.

John was then presented to Mrs. Sunter and her daughters. The former was an English woman by birth and education, and had still an intense love for the institutions and manners of her native land. She greeted the young man most warmly, and then introduced him to her daughters, Julia, Harriet, and Elizabeth. They were handsome, sprightly girls, with bright, healthy complexions, and voices that would have been thought a little too loud and rough in an English drawing-room. John liked them all the better for their genial good nature and warmth of manner. He found the family divided in opinion as to the impending war. The father and mother were strongly in favour of Northern supremacy, whilst the daughters were enthusiastic advocates of the Confederate cause.

They were sitting at the open windows looking out upon the lovely New-England scenery, and admiring the setting sun, when John unconsciously called forth these opposing views by remarking :—

“The country here seems so peaceful that it is difficult to imagine that it is about to become the scene of a tremendous conflict.”

“Its peaceful appearance is more apparent than real,” replied Mr. Sunter; “in the hearts of the people fierce passions have been kindled that will not soon be extinguished.”

“Then you think it impossible to prevent open hostilities ?” John asked.

“Quite impossible,” was the gloomy reply. “I fear this war will ruin the trade and prosperity of the nation for many years, perhaps centuries, to come, but considerations founded upon the nation’s welfare seems to have but little weight in the Southern councils.”

“Can you be surprised at it, father ?” asked Elizabeth, whilst a glow of indignation suffused her cheeks. “Is it not better to be free, even though they would have to endure hardships afterwards, rather than remain as

at present, under the iron yoke of Northern subjection?"

"Their wrongs are more fancied than real, my dear child," replied Mr. Sunter; "they are merely fighting for an idea, whilst we are about to fight for our very existence as a great and united nation."

"It would be in every way a deplorable ending of the war," observed John, whose sympathies were wholly with the North. "If the insurrection succeeds, America would no longer be feared in Europe, because America would no longer consist of United States."

"I quite agree with you," said Mr. Sunter, joining in the conversation. "Two independent nations in North America, so closely allied in language and institutions, yet so far removed by political differences, would always be at variance."

"Is there any probability that the Confederate States will succeed, if indeed war is proclaimed?" asked John.

"It is impossible to answer that question," replied Mr. Sunter; "the Southern troops

would be far superior to the great mass of those we could put in the field, as regards discipline, coolness, bravery, and obedience to authority, and they will be fighting for a cause which inspires them with the greatest enthusiasm. Our troops will have to contend against all these superior advantages of the enemy."

"But why do you suppose that the Northern troops will lack enthusiasm?" asked John.

"Because they are composed of so many nationalities," replied Mrs. Sunter, quickly, seeing that her husband was not quite prepared with a reply. "A very large proportion of our men are naturalised Irishmen and Germans, and, therefore, they do not care much as to who wins provided they are paid."

"And I presume the army of the insurgents will be drawn from the native Americans," said John.

"Almost entirely," replied Mrs. Sunter, "and they are fighting for what they consider to be liberty—an idea which has always great influence upon men's minds. Every

man that falls will be a martyred hero like the Spartans at Thermopylæ."

"Then eventually it is possible that they will succeed in establishing their independence," observed John, thoughtfully.

"I do not think so," replied his host. "If we succeed in blockading their ports, and thus cutting off the tide of immigration, it is a mere question of time as to when they lay down their arms."

"They will scatter the Northern hordes to the four winds of Heaven long before their men and supplies are exhausted," said Harriet, confidently. "If it is a question of enthusiasm against numbers, I put my faith in enthusiasm."

"So should I, if I were your age, Harriet," observed her mother, with a smile; "but as it is, numbers, in my opinion, must prevail."

The conversation dropped for the time, supper being announced, and at the table the conversation turned upon England. The young ladies and their mother were equally curious to hear about a country in which all seemed to have a strong personal interest.

"How is this impending war regarded by the people at large?" asked Mrs. Sunter, addressing John.

"I cannot pretend to be an exponent of English popular feeling on the subject, my dear madam," replied John; "because I am obliged to confess that I have not given due attention to the matter, until there was a probability that I would be sent out. There is a strong feeling amongst the middle and upper classes in favour of the South; and I have no doubt an effort will be made to induce the Government to recognise the Insurgent States as an independent Power. The great masses of Englishmen are, however, undoubtedly in favour of a continuance of the Union, and the total abolition of slavery."

"Will England take an active part in the struggle?" asked Miss Sunter, whose future husband was a strong advocate of the Union, but he had failed to convince the young lady.

"I am sure she will not interfere," replied John; "the time has gone by when Englishmen thought it to be their duty to interfere with every man's quarrel."

"It will injure English industry very much," observed Miss Elizabeth, who was greatly interested in the conversation. "Lancashire, for instance, will suffer greatly."

"Yes, Lancashire must feel the effects of the war as much as any state in America," replied John, but he could not foresee half the suffering that would really be brought upon the cotton operatives.

The conversation then turned upon the habits and manners of the working classes in England, and Mrs. Sunter made some inquiries respecting Manchester, which proved to be her native home. The party separated shortly afterwards for the night, and John found it to be a most pleasurable change to sleep once more upon dry land. He dreamt that he was once again upon English ground, and rambling side by side with Louisa Hamilton in the garden of The Elms, but somehow Lousia's face was like Isabel Greenwood's, and her voice was soft and grave like the voice that he had heard in the Botanical Gardens one evening.

He arose betimes next morning, and went out

into the pure open air to collect his thoughts. His dream had forcibly recalled to his mind the friends that were left behind, and there was a great longing in his heart to be once more upon English ground, within reach of the loved one there. Even now he could scarcely determine between the two. Louisa he liked—she was so childish, so innocent, and so trusting, that he could not resist her sweet, girlish beauty, especially as an union with her would be so advantageous to him in a worldly point of view, but when he thought of the queenly beauty and grace, and the strong pure faith of Isabel Greenwood, the old struggle recommenced within him. And yet it sometimes occurred to him that Isabel cared nothing for him. Be that as it might, he felt that his regard for her was in no way diminished. After breakfast, Mr. Sunter drove John to the city and showed him over his warehouses, which were of an enormous size.

“I do not exactly understand,” he remarked to John, as they passed through one of the rooms, “why Mr. Hamilton should send you

out here to Boston at all, unless indeed he thought that I would be able to supply you with the whole quantity. You see I am only an agent in this business, and I have to buy my cotton elsewhere, just as Mr. Hamilton does; the only difference is, that I am nearer the market than he is."

"Where is the most convenient market, then?" asked John, to whom the same idea had occurred on his outward voyage.

"I should recommend you to go to Charleston," replied Mr. Sunter. "There is, I believe, an immense quantity of cotton in the town and its environs, and you can conclude the business at once."

"I will follow your advice," replied John; and that evening he wrote to Mr. Hamilton, announcing his intended visit to Charleston. He concluded a purchase of ten thousand bales from Mr. Sunter before he left Boston, and this amount was shipped off to England as soon as possible. The open rupture between the parties had not yet taken place, but it was impossible to say when it might occur.

Three weeks after his arrival in Boston, he

stood on the quays of Charleston. The city was in a state of great excitement. Large and enthusiastic meetings were being continually held, in which the Southern claims to independence was advocated in no measured language. Subscription lists, for a host of purposes connected with the approaching struggle, were being opened, and men, both young and old, were trained and drilled for the army. The enthusiasm was tremendous, and quite indescribable. John wondered as he gazed from the window of the hotel, where he took up his abode, upon the crowds of gaily-dressed ladies who promenaded the streets, wearing the Southern colours, whether these same ladies would ever feel the iron grip of war which they thought so little of at that time.

The people of the South were like all Americans, rather given to boastful talk, and their expectations were far too sanguine ever to be realized. They hoped to conquer the armies of the North almost at one blow, and they certainly believed that the war would be over in a much shorter space of time than it really

occupied. Their strength consisted in great dashing onslaughts, and sudden feats of strategy, and they could not resist the steady, slow, and guarded movements of Grant when he was sent to take command of the army of the Potomac.

Large numbers of rebel songs were teeming from the press, and these were sung with immense spirit by bands of men and boys in the streets.

The day after his arrival, John presented himself at the office of Mr. Sunter's principal correspondents at Charleston. The younger partner alone was present—a Mr. Anderson—who was an extremely affable and agreeable young man, and John was speedily on the best of terms with him. John enquired if there was any cotton to be procured.

“Any amount, my dear sir,” replied Mr. Anderson; “the supply as yet exceeds the demand, although buyers are, of course, investing as much money as they can in it just now.”

“How is it, then, that the supply is not exhausted?” asked John.

"Simply because sellers have only just began to send the material to market," replied Mr. Anderson. "They held back a long time, in order to run up prices, but now they are afraid that if they held back much longer the port will be blockaded."

John then entered into an explanation as to the amount here required, and the price and quality of the material. He also insisted upon its being shipped immediately to England, in order that he might be enabled to finish his task, if possible, before the outbreak of hostilities.

"I think you had better wait until to-morrow," observed Mr. Anderson. "My uncle, Mr. Ditson, will be here then, and he will advise you much better than I can do. Meanwhile, may I ask what do you intend doing to-night?"

"I have no plans whatever for to-night," replied John.

"Well, then, I should be glad if you will come to a little supper I intend giving, where you will meet some pleasant fellows, and spend, I hope, an agreeable evening."

John, of course, thankfully accepted the

invitation, and Mr. Anderson gave him a card, upon which was written the name of the hotel where the supper was to take place.

The hour appointed was nine o'clock, and John duly presented himself at the rendezvous, where he found his host and six or seven other young men assembled. One or two wore military uniforms, but appeared to be extremely uncomfortable, and their swords were constantly becoming entangled in their legs, to the great danger of their safety. The rest were in civilian dress, and seemed to be mostly junior partners or managing clerks. Mr. Anderson introduced John as "the representative of one of the largest cotton buyers in Great Britain," and he received quite an ovation. When order was to some extent restored, Mr. Anderson directed the supper to be laid, and in a very short space of time they were all engaged in doing justice to a capital spread. The guests were in high spirits. No visions of impending defeat and death troubled their minds, and, in listening to their excited talk, John was well nigh tempted to think that Elizabeth Sunter might be right, and that in

the conflict between enthusiasm and numbers the former might carry the day.

"Old Abe" was toasted, with ironical cheers, and then Her Britannic Majesty's health was proposed, with the expression of a hope that she would send over a fleet to assist the Confederates. John responded, without referring, however, to this point, but as his speech expressed the warmest regard for every gentleman present, both individually and collectively, it was received with great applause, and one gentleman cried "Encore."

Mr. Anderson's health was then proposed by John, for, this being the post of honour, it was regarded as a graceful compliment to Great Britain to entrust the toast of the evening into his hands. John performed this duty very gracefully and pleasantly, and his speech gained golden opinions for him from all present.

After this the fun became fast and furious, and some of the gentlemen became uproarious. One of these individuals happened to go to one of the windows, and looked out. Seeing the roof of the porch of one of the back entrances of the hotel at a distance of about

eight feet below, he cried aloud, "I'll lay five dollars there's not one of you can get down on to the grass from here."

There was a general rush to the window, and it was thrown wide open.

"There is no difficulty whatever in that, sir," remarked John ; "I have often seen a similar thing done by schoolboys in England."

"Anybody can do that," shouted another, who had imbibed too much whisky ; "I'll do it in a twinkling."

"All right, old fellow," said the one who had proposed the feat. "Don't break your neck ; you couldn't get such a good fit in Charleston."

The venturesome individual in question had already pulled off his boots, and was preparing to descend. Mr. Anderson tried very earnestly, but without success, to deter them from so foolish a proceeding ; all present, except John and himself, were bent upon the ridiculous exploit.

The first adventurer, having cast aside his boots, clambered out through the window, and suspended himself carefully before he released his hold of the window above him. This done,

he dropped gently on the roof of the porch, and threw himself backwards against the wall. He then slid gently down the tiles in a sitting posture, and when he reached the parapet, he again lowered himself, and dropped easily on the grass.

A shout of applause from above told him that his successful descent had been observed; and then he turned, in order to see whether anyone else would follow his example. He had not long to wait. Another daring spirit made the attempt, and succeeded in reaching the ground, but not without scratching and bruising himself a little.

The gentleman who had proposed the matter, and who was attired in a suit of military undress, considerably too tight for him, now determined to follow the two who had succeeded. He was more excited than either of his predecessors, and he refused to take off his boots lest he should hurt his feet.

He scrambled recklessly out through the window, notwithstanding the cautions of the amused spectators in the room, and, hastily suspending himself, he loosed his hold. He

had been told to throw himself backwards against the wall, but in his excitement he mistook the advice, and threw himself forward. In another moment he was sliding rapidly towards the parapet head foremost. He made violent efforts to save himself, and the peals of laughter from the window above infuriated him greatly, so that in the effort to check his downward progress, and the fury which filled him, he managed to burst the uniform which he wore and this made him a still more ludicrous spectacle. Shouts of irrepressible laughter issued from the apartment above, and this served still more to enrage the unhappy man, but the only effect of his anger was to increase his speed. He reached the parapet, his head quickly vanished over it, and then his legs could be seen for one brief moment stuck up in the air, and disappeared. He lay upon the ground groaning heavily, although his fall had only shaken him a little, the grass being extremely soft and thick. He was, however, greatly terrified, and kicked about convulsively, so that it was somewhat difficult to approach him. The first adventurer, how-

ever, came up to him, dodging the prostrate man's legs with admirable skill and coolness, and, in a voice adapted to the solemnity of the question, he asked, gravely,

"Are you dead, old fellow?"

"Yes, yes, quite dead," groaned the sufferer, kicking out viciously, nevertheless, in the direction of the voice. But his sympathising friend had prudently changed his station. "I am broken to pieces," he groaned, finding that he had failed to kick his consoler.

"Well, then, just hand over the five dollars, will you, because you will have no further use for them?" remarked his friend. But he had to be unusually nimble in order to dodge the very forcible kick which his unfeeling observation elicited.

Eventually they prevailed upon him to get up, and it was found that, with the exception of a flattened nose, he was none the worse for his adventure—in fact, a few glasses of whisky, judiciously administered, restored him to his usual good humour. He still complained, however, of pains in various parts of the body, and Mr. Anderson, who had a turn

for medicine, gravely recommended a little finely-ground Cayenne pepper, in a small quantity of pure brandy; and, although the patient was somewhat doubtful as to the efficacy of this prescription, he was prevailed upon to take it, amid bursts of inextinguishable mirth.

John thought the proceedings rather indecorous, but did not venture to say so, he being the youngest man present in the room. They separated about eleven, and Mr. Anderson, who was perfectly sober—although John remarked that he drank freely during the evening—accompanied him to his hotel.

“I hope you enjoyed yourself,” he said, courteously, as they stood at the entrance to the house.

“It is the most enjoyable evening that I have spent for some time,” replied John. “I should have enjoyed it better if the fun had not been so rough.”

“I must not allow you to leave,” answered Mr. Anderson, pleasantly, “under the impression that what you have seen to-night is a fair reflex of American manners. Nothing

could be further from the truth than such an impression."

"I did not suppose for a moment that it was the custom to slide over the roofs of houses every evening," replied John, with a laugh, "and I felt to-night that you were endeavouring to check the one or two unruly spirits. I must thank you, however, in spite of everything, for a most delightful evening."

Mr. Anderson wished him good night, and John entered the hotel, where he found a letter from Mr. Hamilton. The merchant merely reiterated some instructions which he had previously given him, but which he feared John might forget.

Mr. Ditson waited upon him at the hotel next morning just as he was sitting down to breakfast, and John begged him to take a cup of coffee also. His visitor readily accepted the offer, and during the meal John explained to him, as he had previously done to his partner, the price, quality, and approximate quantity of cotton which he required.

"It will take some time to execute your order," said Mr. Ditson, when John had ended

his explanation ; " it happens that our supply of the kind you require is small just now—in fact it always is, for it is not in such great demand as other sorts, and we must therefore get it specially for you."

" How much time do you require ?" demanded John, anxiously.

" Two months to complete the order," replied Mr. Ditson, quickly.

" Two months !" echoed John, with a laugh, " why, the Federals may be in the port of Charleston before then, and all your cotton confiscated. You must do it in one month."

" It is quite impossible," urged Mr. Ditson ; " the thing cannot be done."

" Very well, then," replied John, decisively, " how much can you procure in a month ?"

Mr. Ditson named a probable quantity.

" You will be good enough, then, to confine your attention to that quantity only," said John ; " I must divide the order into five or six portions. It will be completed, then, in a month."

The merchant was not prepared for this course, and he regretted that he had been so

positive as to the time. No doubt it was possible to procure the whole quantity in a month, but it would subject them to great inconvenience, and he anticipated no serious objection on John's part to the time proposed.

"I should of course be glad," he said, "to have the whole order placed in my hands, and it might perhaps be done in less than two months."

"It must be done in one, Mr. Ditson," was the emphatic reply; "if you can do it, I shall of course leave the matter in your hands—if you cannot, I must divide the order between a number of houses."

"I will try to have it ready, Mr. Raymond," he said; "will that satisfy you?"

"No," replied John, very decidedly, "nothing but your promise to have it ready at the appointed time will satisfy me. The fact is, I wish to get back to England as speedily as possible, and the sooner the cotton is shipped the better."

Mr. Ditson undertook the commission, and John went over with him to his office to arrange the details of the negotiation.

CHAPTER V.

“TOILING, REJOICING, SORROWING.”

ISABEL was shocked and deeply pained at her brother's sudden relapse into his old course. The girl nevertheless summoned up courage to go to the tavern where he sat with a few drivelling boon companions, taking the precaution to put on a thick veil which completely concealed her features. She found him, as the messenger had stated, deeply intoxicated, but even then her voice had the power to recall him in some measure to his senses.

“Edward,” she said, in a firm, decisive voice, which caused the drunkard to open his blood-shot eyes in idiotic wonder, and at the same time taking his hand, “come home, this is not a place for you to be in.”

He obeyed her without a word. Rising to his feet he followed her mechanically, in spite of a few jeers which his companions flung after him ; and without speaking a word she led him

home, and saw him fast asleep in his bed before she left him.

Fortunately her mother had retired to rest long before her return from business, and she was therefore spared the humiliation which Isabel had to endure. She never felt so crushed and wearied as she did that night. Long after the rest of the household had retired, she sat before the expiring embers buried in deep, anxious thought. This man, for whom she had even dared to enter a common beer-house, and faced the lowest herd of Liverpool, had always been a source of trouble and vexation to her. Even when a boy he had tried her patience severely hundreds of times, and then he disappeared, never appearing to have thought that his absence and subsequent silence would cause his mother and sister the least pain.

Again, she reflected, he had made no effort to seek them out, or to learn whether those who loved him best were alive or dead—it appeared to be a matter of perfect indifference to him—and if she had not accidentally seen and recognised him, or he her, they might

never have come together. She recalled the difficulty with which she obtained his consent to the arrangement, and its carrying out practically, and, after all the solemn promises of amendment that he had made, he was again as bad as ever. Why should she strive to save a man who refused to save himself—nay, deliberately assisted in his own ruin? She would allow him to take his own course, nor would she again make any effort on his behalf.

But this angry mood, caused by just indignation, gradually passed away, and the sister's love for her only brother returned in full force. She remembered well the days of their childhood, when she had been accustomed to regard her brother with mixed feelings of admiration and love, believing him to be a model of mental and physical excellence, and running to him to redress the small wrongs and grievances which occupied her little mind. Those days of early childhood passed away, and as boy and girl together in the same national school, she remembered well how proud she felt when her clever brother carried off the best prizes, and always stood at the head of his class.

What dreams and air-castles she formed at that time! She told herself that the time would come when her brother would be a great and distinguished man, and when the people would be crying, “ Hurrah,” and the ladies in the carriages waving their handkerchiefs ; the girl promised herself that she should stand by her brother’s side to share his triumph !

The pleasing edifices were rudely shattered when he ran away, but as months and years passed away, she began again to rear up a beautiful structure. She hoped to see him return one day with abundant wealth, but above all, famous and great among men. She longed to see him acknowledged by the common herd as a man who towered above them in the might of intellectual strength, and by degrees she learned to watch and wait for his coming with eager expectation, fully believing him to be treading the pathway of fame.

All that was over now. The bitter awakening from her long dream of future greatness and fame for her only brother, had come upon her with a suddenness that increased the pain,

and made the cup of sorrow more difficult to drink. Throughout the long years of his absence, she never dreamt, even in gloomier and more desponding moments, that she would find him a degraded drunkard, utterly unable to control himself—a slave to the most fatal of all vices !

Still she could not give him up. Who would care for him if he was again turned adrift upon the world, and who would stretch out a hand to save him from an untimely grave, if she, his sister, refused to do it? Degraded as he was to the very lowest depths of humiliation, she could not abandon him to his fate, but would love him still, pray for him still, help him still, to overcome his besetting sin.

She was very pale and tearful when she rose after this long conflict with herself, and she knelt down and prayed earnestly and fervently that her brother might yet be saved from the ruinous sin into which he had fallen.

He was very humble and penitent next morning, and came of his own accord to accompany her to town.

“ You cannot be more ashamed of my conduct than I am myself,” he said, penitently. “ I thought I was strong enough to drink one glass only, but I was mistaken.”

“ You must not enter a house where drink is sold, Edward,” she said, firmly; “ your good resolutions are but of little value, if you cannot keep away from such places altogether.”

“ I know it,” he replied, in the same penitent, self-reproachful tone, “ and I know how very weak I am. Ah, Isabel! I sometimes fear that I shall never be respectable and sober any more.”

“ It is wrong to indulge such fancies, Edward,” she said, gently, “ when your reformation depends entirely upon yourself. If you fail, it will be your own fault entirely.”

“ I know that perfectly well,” he replied, hastily, “ and I mean to make a very great effort this time, Isabel. If I fail again, I will go away for ever.”

“ You must not think of such a thing, Edward,” she said, firmly; “ you have always the chance of reformation while you remain with us—with strangers there will be no hope for you.”

"I cannot disgrace you thus, Isabel," he replied; and his eyes filled with tears as he spoke; "the humiliation is great everywhere, but infinitely greater when it brings shame and sorrow to you. If you only knew how much I envy those shopmen who are taking down the shutters around us. Even in the very humblest shop of all! They are at least useful and respectable, whilst I am an out-cast!"

"I said before, Edward," she replied gently, "and I repeat it, your reformation is entirely in your own hands, humanly speaking. Let me beg of you to begin at once. Go home now and set to work in real earnest, and promise never to enter a beer-house again."

"I promise, Isabel," he said solemnly, and he was thoroughly in earnest when he made it.

They parted before she came to her place of employment, and he returned home; and, in pursuance of his newly-formed resolution, he applied himself once more diligently to work. He had been entrusted with a commission by a gentleman, who had always taken considerable interest in him, with the

construction of a road over a wild and hilly part of his estate, and he began to make the necessary plans. Several bridges were required to be built, and a great number of obstacles had to be removed, so that, upon the whole, the undertaking was likely to be a profitable one to him.

He became cheerful and light-hearted, even, as he worked away in the neat little parlour into which the glad sunshine was streaming, and he thought with unusual tenderness of his sister—the sister who loved and cheered him and encouraged him to work, when every other friend upon earth had deserted him.

It was easy to be penitent and virtuous in that pleasant parlour, with his sister's soft voice still ringing in his ears, but in the world and amongst men Edward Greenwood was one of the weakest creatures that ever trifled with temptation and was subdued by it. His life, from the time when he first commenced his downward career, had been made up of good resolutions and their violation. So long as he could shut his eyes to

the temptation, he was safe, but hitherto he had completely failed fairly to meet and overcome it. He was busily engaged upon his plans when his mother came in, and he hastened to set a chair for her, and to seat her comfortably.

She was greatly changed during the last few weeks. Her thin black hair, which, not long, was only streaked with grey, was rapidly changing its hue, and her hands trembled and shook as if with an ague. Her memory was stronger and clearer than it had been, but in every other respect she seemed to be giving way, and her constitution was gradually breaking.

"It is a great comfort for me, Edward," she said, in a weak, quavering voice, that jarred upon the ear, "to have you and Isabel with me. Where did you say you spent the years that you were away?"

"In many places, mother," he replied, laying down his pencil; "wherever I could find something to do."

"Ah! we have all to fight our way in this world," said the old lady, with a deep sigh.

"I have had my share of trouble, and you must meet yours also."

Edward's troubles were the consequences of his own folly and misconduct, but his mother was in happy ignorance of that fact.

"What are you doing now, my boy?" she asked, as he again took up his pencil.

"Making some plans, mother," he replied—"plans for a gentleman who is going to make a new road on his estate."

"I am glad to see you at work," she said, with a touch of reproach in her voice, as if she suspected the true state of affairs. "Isabel is working herself to death to keep this place up."

"You surely do not mean that she is unwell?" he said, with real alarm, and looking up anxiously from his work. "She appeared quite well this morning."

"She is not so strong as she was before she removed into lodgings," replied his mother, with a sigh. "The care and anxiety, added to her daily employment, are too much for her. She never was a strong girl, you know."

He was pacing up and down the room in great agitation.

"What a brute I am!" he thought, "to be a burden upon this poor girl, who is working herself to death rather than let me go to ruin. I am a thorough scoundrel; it was never so certain as it is now. What on earth shall I do? If I go away she will fret and worry herself about me until she becomes really ill, and if I remain she will have to work like a slave, just as she is doing now. I am in a pretty position."

His mother's voice interrupted his reverie.

"I wish you would not stamp up and down the room in that fashion, Edward," she said, fretfully, "it makes me quite ill. Sit still and go to work again."

"I will, mother," he replied, taking up the pencil he had thrown aside.

"Work, work," he said to himself, "that is the only way to extricate myself. A fellow with my advantages ought to support half a dozen sisters, if necessary, rather than be dependent upon them. Work, work."

He became deeply absorbed in his plans,

and his mother dosed tranquilly in her chair. Hours slipped away, and at length Mrs. Greenwood awoke and asked for some tea, which Edward directed the landlady to make. He himself would take nothing until his work was done. At last he arose and put on his hat.

“Where are you going, Edward?” asked Mrs. Greenwood, peevishly; “I do not like to be left alone.”

She had been accustomed, nevertheless, to a good deal of solitude before his arrival.

“I am going to take these plans to the gentleman’s solicitors,” he replied, soothingly; “do not distress yourself; I will not be long away.”

The gentleman in question was one of the largest landed proprietors in the neighbourhood. He had often distributed prizes at the school where Edward was educated, and he had noticed the bright clever youth who had carried away all the best rewards. He made inquiries respecting him afterwards, and discovered him in his degraded manhood, and gave him several commissions, in order to afford him the means of reformation if he

chose to employ them. It was to this gentleman's solicitors that he now repaired.

He was shown into the private room, and received a friendly greeting from the senior partner, who was present, and who knew the details of his history. He unfolded his plans, and explained fully the various measures he intended to adopt.

The lawyer was much pleased with the skill and cleverness displayed by the young engineer.

"It is a pity, Mr. Hewitt," he said, "that you do not apply yourself more assiduously to your profession. There is no doubt whatever that you would succeed."

"I am determined to do so, sir," he replied resolutely. "I have left my old haunts and companions, and am now living with my sister and mother. I want to be able to support them."

"Where is your father that he does not provide for his wife and daughter?" asked the lawyer.

"Did he provide for his son, sir?" cried Edward, with a bitter laugh. "He treated

me badly, but he treated them much worse. They shall never return to him, unless he changes greatly.”

“ That is, of course, your own affair,” observed the lawyer ; “ and, perhaps, under the circumstances, it is well to let him have his own way. I know a few things about him, and I believe he will be run to earth one of these next days.”

“ I am afraid I would not regret it,” replied Edward, bitterly. “ I know that my life hitherto has been a sinful and dissipated one, but if I had been judiciously cared for when a boy, it might have been different.”

“ We cannot say what might have been,” replied the lawyer, gravely. “ Your future course, at least, is open before you. Let me urge you to redeem the past, by living a better future.”

He gave him ten guineas as part payment of the whole amount which would be due to him, and with this money Edward returned home. There were many temptations on the road, but fortunately he met no one that he knew, and arrived at the house without stop-

ping once. He found his mother asleep again, and being a little tired himself he followed her example, and took a nap.

The sun was setting when he awoke, and his mother was again enjoying a cup of tea—the only beverage she ever tasted. He joined her now, and told her that he intended going to meet Isabel.

“Yes, I shall be glad if you will, my boy,” replied his mother, anxiously. “I am very uneasy about that poor child. She is overtaxing her strength, and I am afraid she will give way quite suddenly.”

“You are troubling yourself without cause, mother,” he said, with an attempt at gaiety. “Isabel is just as well as ever. But she shall have a rest. I have received ten guineas to-day, mother.”

“Ten guineas to-day!” echoed the old lady, who, since her marriage, had never seen so large a sum. “Did you earn it all to-day?”

“No, mother,” he said, laughingly, “that would be too good, you know. I only finished some of the plans to-day, and I was paid for them at once.”

“You will make your fortune soon, my boy,” replied his mother, cheerfully; “then Isabel need not to work like this any longer.”

“She must not wait until I have made my fortune,” he answered. “She must give up work before then. But I must start now to meet her.”

He took the precaution of leaving the money at home, lest he should be tempted to spend it, and then he walked briskly into the town. People were returning from their daily toil, and a few shops were being closed, but as yet the stream of traffic was but little diminished. He arrived before the establishment nearly half-an-hour too soon, and he walked patiently up and down the opposite pavement until Isabel made her appearance. She was evidently greatly pleased to see him there, and her glad smile more than repaid him for the little trouble he had taken.

“I scarcely expected to see you,” she said, as he came up to her, “and yet I hoped you would be here.”

“I have been endeavouring to begin the work of reformation,” he said, “and I have

made a good commencement. I received ten guineas to-day."

"I am so glad," she said, simply, but in her heart she dreaded lest this money might be the means of leading him astray again.

"You must take it all, Isabel," he said, guessing her thoughts; "I am not fit to keep it, and you have learnt by experience the value of money."

She certainly had, if living on a small salary and enduring constant privations could teach her.

He examined her countenance keenly and anxiously, to see if there were any traces of the weakness his mother had spoken about. The eyes were just as bright as ever, the smile was still sunny and charming, the same patience and strength of will which John Raymond had read in it were still perceptible; but there was a change, although it was difficult to discover in what it consisted. The bloom of her soft damask cheeks was faded, and a careworn harassed look was often seen in her eyes. There was a change, and it smote her brother to the heart.

“You are not looking very well, Isabel, dear,” he said, with assumed cheerfulness; “your little head is getting too full of anxiety. You must have a rest, dear.”

“Rest!” she repeated, sadly; “there are moments when I feel that I should like to close my eyes never to open them again; but I know that it is wrong and foolish to wish such a thing. I want no rest, except the knowledge that, if anything happened to me, mother would be provided for, and the feeling that you have broken off for ever your old habits. That is the burden that presses so heavily upon me, Edward.” She spoke in a desponding voice that pained her brother.

“You are a little out of spirits to-day, Isabel,” he said, cheerfully; “you will be better to-morrow.”

“I do not think so,” she replied. “I have been so miserable for some days now, and it is growing on me, rather than passing away. It is so hard to stand in the show-room answering the frivolous questions of fashionable ladies all day long, when my mind is so full of mother and you.”

The brave resolute spirit was unnerved a little, but the strain had been a long and severe one.

"Isabel," said her brother, gently, "in a short time I shall be able to support mother and you, and then you must give up this work. You will only have to watch over me then, and save me from my own weakness, dear, and that will be a sufficiently heavy task."

She smiled at him through the tears which filled her eyes.

"Were you ever in love, Isabel?" he asked, in the same gentle manner, thinking it possible that her despondency might be partly attributed to something of the kind.

"Never," she replied, looking him in the face with her clear honest eyes; "in fact, I have not had time yet to become acquainted with the sentimental side of life, and I do not wish to have the opportunity. There are too many real troubles in life to meet without worrying ourselves with the imaginary ones that love so often brings."

"They are not always imaginary ills," re-

plied her brother, gravely ; " some people find them to be real and painful ones."

" You speak as if you were in love," she said, laughingly ; " who is the fair lady?"

" Am I the kind of person to fall in love?" he asked, with a bitter laugh ; " if I had done so it would have been well for me, for an influence of that kind would in all probability have saved me from the slough I rushed into."

They were standing on the pavement before the door of the house as he spoke these last words, and Isabel opened it with her latch key and they entered. Mrs. Greenwood was cross and peevish, because they happened to be ten minutes late.

" We had so much to talk about, mother," said Isabel, soothingly, while she smoothed the invalid's pillow that supported her head. " Edward was telling me of the great sum he received to-day, and I did not know what to do with so much money. We must get up very early to spend it all, mother," she said, with a merry laugh.

" Edward is a good boy," returned the old

lady, approvingly ; for she had already been forming elaborate calculations as to the number of new dresses and other articles for Isabel which ten guineas represented ; and although her own experience as to new dresses was rather limited, owing to her amiable husband's objection to such luxuries, she was nevertheless aware that this sum would be of material benefit and assistance in adorning her beautiful daughter.

Isabel prepared a supper of unusual excellence that evening, in honour of the occasion. The anxious look was almost gone now, as she hurried about to prepare the meal. How they all enjoyed it ! There were radishes and watercresses, and new fresh butter, and tea brewed unusually strong ; and Mrs. Greenwood declared she had never enjoyed a meal better in her whole life ; an opinion in which Isabel and Edward perfectly agreed.

Then, after the supper was over and the tray was removed to the kitchen, they sat around the fire and conversed long and cheerfully together. Isabel thought that her

troubles were nearly over now—her season of rejoicing was come.

Edward was hard at work at six o'clock next morning, and Isabel found him seated before his drawings when she came down.

Brother and sister breakfasted together, and then he put on his hat to escort her, as usual, to town.

They were cheerful and even merry on the road, and Isabel commenced her usual duties in much better spirits than since the day her brother first came. Meanwhile, that brother was trudging homewards, when he met Mr. Robson face to face.

“I wanted to see you, particularly, Hewitt,” he said. “There are some matters respecting the lead mine which require explanation, and you, of course, as engineer, are the very man to satisfy the shareholders.”

“I will have nothing further to do with the matter, Mr. Robson,” replied Edward, firmly. “The scheme was concocted by you, and you were perfectly well aware that the swindle would be eventually discovered. You intended to take to your heels, no doubt,

when the matter was brought to light, and if so, I recommend you to start now."

His tone was one of cool defiance, and it infuriated Robson, but he was too crafty to exhibit his displeasure.

"This is a serious matter, Hewitt," he said, quietly, "and cannot be discussed in the street. Come into this hotel, and I will put things before you in a clearer light."

"I have nothing to do with the business," replied Edward, decisively; "and I do not wish to enter a hotel again. Drink has made me your tool once or twice before. Do you expect it to have a similar effect now?"

Still Robson was calm and smiling, although his heart was filled with rage.

"You need not drink anything unless you wish it, Hewitt," he said, persuasively. "A few minutes conversation can do you no harm."

He yielded and went in.

Some whisky and brandy were placed on the table in a private room, and Mr. Robson poured out some of the former, and then mixed it with sugar and hot water and drank

it with much relish. The smell of the spirit was beginning to excite Edward. He resisted for some time, then drew the decanter towards him, saying, “I will take just one glass.”

He did not stir, however, untill he drank half a dozen, and when he was sufficiently intoxicated, Robson explained to him that some of the largest shareholders were becoming very uneasy as to the state of the mine, and that it would be necessary to have another report issued by him to reassure them.

He was promised handsome payment, and money was a consideration with Edward Greenwood at that period. He consented to undertake the duty, and Robson directed him to call upon him that night, when he would receive ample means to carry him into South Wales and back. His object being accomplished, Robson went away.

Edward had sufficient sense left to enable him to stumble homewards without attracting very much attention. He was not very much intoxicated; he was sober enough to curse his own folly in giving way so readily to temptation. When he arrived home, he found

that his mother had not yet made her appearance, so he went to his own room and slept heavily.

The afternoon was far advanced when he awoke. The fumes of the brandy were almost gone, and after bathing his burning brow he descended to the parlour, where his mother was curious to know the cause of his absence. He complained of a severe headache, but he managed to resume the task he had thrown aside in the morning, and he worked assiduously until Isabel came home.

She suspected that something was wrong when she found that he was not awaiting her as usual, and she had hurried rapidly homewards, dreading the confirmation of her worst suspicions. She was greatly relieved to find him quietly at work, but it was easy to see that he had been drinking. Still this was not nearly so bad as she expected, and she felt thankful that it was so.

When Mrs. Greenwood had retired to rest the brother and sister sat together, and Edward related the circumstances of the morning, explaining fully his connection with

the mine, and expressing his intention to keep out of Robson's way for the future.

“He does not know that you are here?” asked Isabel. “Did he ask you for your address?”

“No,” he replied positively, “he merely told me to call upon him, and I promised to do so. He has no idea where I am residing.”

“Your only course, then,” replied Isabel, “is to remain indoors as much as possible. You are safe here from everything, but you do not know what risks you may encounter by going out too frequently. Set to work with a will, and do not come to meet me any more.”

He promised to follow her advice, and they retired to rest.

CHAPTER VI.

FUTURE AMERICA.

MR. DITSON was determined to fulfil his part of the contract, and great efforts were consequently made by the firm to procure the stipulated amount of cotton. Several ship loads were already on their way to England, and John's time was fully occupied in superintending the loading of the vessels and in other similar business.

He had removed from the hotel where he originally took up his quarters. Mr. Anderson pressed him so earnestly to take up his residence with him during the remainder of his stay in Charleston that he could not refuse, even if he wished to do so. His new friend, however, was so genial and warm-hearted that John anticipated a very pleasant time during his sojourn with him.

Mr. Anderson resided in a large fashionable house in one of the leading streets of the

town, and occupied four rooms. The proprietress of the place was a widow, who being left on the death of her husband with a handsome sum of money and two children, determined to set up a fashionable lodging house, with the double object of securing a permanent income and of parading her mature charms before her bachelor lodgers, some one of whom might be disposed to become lord of the widow and her house.

She regarded Mr. Anderson with the greatest respect, partly because he was a member of one of the wealthiest firms in Charleston, partly because he was unmarried, and treated the widow with the greatest politeness, which she construed into a feeling of admiration for her charms. Mr. Anderson, however, was in happy ignorance of this fact, or he would, in all probability have removed from so dangerous a locality.

His rooms were on the second floor, and were furnished in an exceedingly handsome manner. The widow had spared neither trouble nor expense to make her house attractive, and in return she charged high

prices for the accommodation. The particular rooms occupied by Mr. Anderson were the best in the house; and in addition to the landlady's furniture, there were many other articles lying about which belonged to Mr. Anderson. His tastes could be easily ascertained, for he had stamped the room with his own individuality, as it were. There were costly pictures after the old masters, a harp and violin, several books of sketches, and in one room a handsome library. The works of the best American authors were of course present, but the greater number were English and French books. There was but little poetry, more science, still more fiction, but the proprietor appeared to study history and philosophy more than any other branches of literature.

In the sitting room his tastes were very strikingly manifest. The newest magazines and reviews, both English and American, lay about the room; and upon the mantelpiece was a curiously carved cabinet which contained smoking materials of all kinds in abundance. Smoking was not a mere amusement to Mr. Anderson. He was accustomed to maintain

that it, when properly performed, required more skill and ability than most people imagined, and that, in fact, it was an extremely fine art. The cabinet in question contained all kinds of smoking apparatus, from the tiniest cigarette up to a ponderous meerschaum, and every pipe in it had a curious history connected with it.

John received a warm welcome, and was in a short time quite at ease in his new abode. His friend drew the blinds, stirred up the fire, and produced cigars and beer, a beverage for which Mr. Anderson had all the liking of an Englishman.

"Make yourself comfortable," he said, drawing on his slippers; "you might imagine that you are in England from your surroundings. When do you expect to return?"

"In three weeks time," replied John, "so soon as you have fulfilled the contract. I shall have nothing to detain me then."

"You might speculate a little on your own account," observed Mr. Anderson, "it would be a profitable transaction for you if you invested a few hundreds in cotton just at this moment."

"I would gladly do so," replied John, with a laugh, "but I do not happen to be the owner of one hundred, without mentioning several. I shall receive a percentage on the sale of the cotton I am now buying, and it will prove, I hope, a handsome sum. I am not a capitalist—only an agent."

"Supposing I speculated then on my own account," said Mr. Anderson, slowly, "quite apart from Mr. Ditson, who would never enter upon such a proceeding. Supposing I were disposed to send ten thousand pounds worth of cotton over to England, could you store it and hold it over for me until the market rises?"

"I really do not know," replied John, in some perplexity; "I cannot, of course, say whether Mr. Hamilton would approve of such an arrangement."

"But, my dear fellow," replied his companion, "I really do not see why you should ask for his opinion. No doubt if he had sufficient capital he would have invested more money in his present venture, and I am perfectly certain that if I made this offer

directly to him he would close with it at once."

"I quite agree with you there," replied John, "but Mr. Hamilton and myself are not similarly situated, and therefore what might be a proper course for him to pursue might possibly be an improper one for me. The fact is, I am bound to Mr. Hamilton by the strongest ties of gratitude and esteem, and I could not accept any offer which he disapproved of."

"It is not certain that he would disapprove of it," observed Mr. Anderson.

"No, and there is time to lay the matter before him," replied John; "I will write to-morrow, and I shall remain here until his reply arrives."

"That is settled then," answered his friend, "and I strongly hope your principal will make no objection. I have a small plantation of my own about forty miles from here, and there is a great quantity of cotton stored there. I am afraid we shall be blockaded eventually, and in that case England will be short of the raw material, and it will be a

drug here. I am willing to give you one-third of the nett profits for your trouble."

"I shall be quite satisfied," replied John, "and of course I shall be glad to undertake the commission if Mr. Hamilton gives his consent. It is a great risk, nevertheless, both to him and you."

"I do not think so," replied Mr. Anderson, lighting a huge Manilla; "we may not be blockaded, it is true, but even in that case I believe the war will be carried into the territories of both belligerents, and there is sure to be an immense waste of all kinds of property. If they come near here my cotton will be safer in England."

"Who do you think will eventually succeed in the struggle?" asked John, who was anxious to hear the views of one who resided in the midst of Confederates.

"I dare not venture to express an opinion," was the thoughtful reply; "both sides are so well matched, and so full of fancied and real grievances that it is difficult to say how the strife will terminate. Nor do I think that it is a matter of much consequence."

"Supposing the Confederate States succeed in establishing their independence," observed John, "do you not think that this would necessarily perpetuate slavery, and also a feeling of bitter hatred between the two great sections of Americans?"

"I do not for a moment believe that the success of the Confederate armies would perpetuate slavery," replied his friend; "it might prolong its existence, but the institution would succumb in time, when the people were better educated, and taught to think for themselves. Slavery could not exist for a moment in England, for instance, because the people have been taught to love freedom for its own sake; whereas here people love to be free, but they would not object to see every one else slaves, provided it ministered to their comforts or pleasures in any way. When our lower orders become, so to speak, more human, slavery would collapse."

"Granting your view to be correct," pursued John, "you cannot deny that a permanent rupture between the Federal and Confederate States would materially weaken the power,

and therefore the influence of America abroad, besides setting people over here by the ears."

"That would probably be the immediate effect," replied Mr. Anderson, calmly, "but the rupture could not be a permanent one. Two nations could not co-exist upon the same continent, having the same origin, manners, customs, laws, language, and religion. In a short time—shorter perhaps than it would be safe even to suggest now—some understanding would be arrived at; there would be a new Union, far more powerful than the present one, and the grievances of both sides would be completely buried and forgotten."

"You think, then, that it would be well for the Confederate States to succeed in their efforts," observed John.

"Yes, I think so," replied Mr. Anderson; "if the Federal Government succeeds in putting down, what is called in Washington, the rebellion, but which is no rebellion at all, then I apprehend the worst possible effects from their victory. A conquered people are always ready to rise, and, if a suitable opportunity presents itself, I believe the land-

owners of the South would make a great effort to shake off the yoke which was imposed, or rather reimposed, upon them by military force."

"These feelings might possibly exist for a certain number of years," remarked John, "but they would eventually disappear, and the relations between North and South would be as cordial as ever—nay, the very distinction would probably disappear also."

"I do not agree with you," replied Mr. Anderson; "these feelings do not so readily disappear. Has the old jealousy between England and France disappeared, although they were allies in the Crimea? Even admitting that the bitter personal feeling may in time pass away, the fact that the Union was once almost successfully menaced will incite future politicians to act in a similar manner if they find it to their interest to do so."

"You do not believe, then, that the Union will be permanently established whatever may be the issue of this war," said John.

"Not the Union in its present form," replied his friend, confidently; "it must be

enlarged and developed, and most of our institutions must be remodelled. There will be no country on the face of the earth so glorious and powerful as the future United States. Her limits will extend to the furthest extremity of the Continent, and the whole of North America will be subject to her sway."

He was becoming enthusiastic, and his face seemed lighted up with fervour.

"It is useless," he said, "to endeavour to resist the onward march of a free people, and when America is free, not only in name, but in reality, her power will increase and be felt throughout the globe. Years will pass away, but my dream of to-day will be a glorious reality in the future. A complete revolution in manners and morals will one day take place; the miserable, boastful lying talk and rude lawless habits will be swept away, education will become real instead of apparent, as at present, civilization will manifest a wider and higher development than it has ever done before; after that America will be great!"

"But why do you assume that this mighty moral revolution, which you anticipate, will

take place in the New World? May it not originate in the Old?"

"It will never commence in the Old World," was the unhesitating reply, "because the moral and intellectual life of the Old World is decaying fast. The vigour and life is mostly here—in a few more years it will be still more so, and men, wearied with the endless quarrels, contentions, and disputes, the exploded ideas and superstitions, and the heavy burdens of the Old World, will enter upon a fresh phase of existence in the New."

"You are quite an enthusiast upon this subject," remarked John, who had listened with much interest to this glowing picture of the future greatness of America, although he did not concur in it. "Do you hope to see this change?"

"No," he replied, shaking his head sadly, "it will not be accomplished in our days—perhaps not in that of our children. Our lives are so short, and great changes in the moral world are so long developing, that it is useless to expect it. Some of our descendants will live in that great awakening, but the

grass will grow and wither upon our graves many times before then."

"Taking this view of the present quarrel," pursued John, "would you fight if you were called upon to do so?"

"I could not hesitate if my country called upon me to take up arms," he replied. "Whatever my personal feelings may be, I would put them aside; it would be a question of national duty."

"Is this the view that is generally held respecting the dispute," inquired John, again.

"I think not," was the reply; "most of our land-owners are smarting under the sense of deep grievances, and there is everywhere a burning desire to be independent. The ultimate results of the struggle do not present themselves to the popular view in a time of great excitement like the present."

Their cigars were burning low, and John saw that the conversation had greatly depressed Mr. Anderson's spirits. He therefore recommended that lights should be brought in and some supper, and the servant was

speedily occupied in laying the cover and in making the other preparations.

"You ought to take a wife, Mr. Anderson," John remarked as they sat at the supper table.

"I am going to do so," he replied, with a smile; "the ceremony is to take place so soon as the state of affairs in the country become more settled."

"Is the lady a resident in Charleston?" inquired John.

"No, she resides at Wilmington," he replied, "and I do not often see her. She was staying here last summer, and we met very frequently."

"It will do you a great amount of good," observed John, with an air of wisdom, as though he were fully conversant by experience with the subject. "A wife would drive away the gloomy fancies which I can see sometimes oppress you, and clear away all the cobwebs from your mind."

"I suppose you have tried it," remarked Mr. Anderson, gravely. "Englishmen are fond of settling in life early I believe."

"Sensible Englishmen are," replied John, laughingly; "and though I have not tried it myself, I believe it to be a very pleasant and effectual remedy for melancholy and low spirits."

"I hope your wooing will not be so complicated as mine was at all events," replied Mr. Anderson, with a smile; "the young lady was engaged to a cousin whom she cared nothing for, and when I proposed to her she told me frankly how she was situated, adding that if I could procure her release from her previous engagement, which seems to have been made by her father and mother, and also gain her parents' consent, she would accept me. Of course I set to work with all the ardour of a lover full of his first passion. I saw the cousin, who turned out to be a grimy unpleasant coal merchant, and after considerable difficulty I induced him to release her from her engagement. I then visited the lady's father, and was flatly refused."

"What was your next proceeding?" asked John, with great curiosity.

"I tried the mother," he replied, "and I

was equally unsuccessful, and then, as a last recourse, I appealed to the daughter, but she positively refused to do anything without her parents' consent."

"An unusually virtuous proceeding for an American young lady, was it not?" observed John.

"Perhaps it was; I really do not know," he answered; "this was the only occasion upon which I ever paid attention to the subject. However, becoming desperate, I invited the coal merchant to the hotel where I was staying, and after plying him with a few glasses of grog, I told him the whole story. His advice was to carry the young lady off and put her on board a coal vessel that lay at his wharf, and which was to sail on the following morning. I could not follow this advice, however, and eventually I induced him for a handsome consideration to wait upon the father next morning and use his influence in my favour. He did so, and I was accepted."

"The coal merchant acted most nobly," remarked John; "few men in his position would have followed his example."

"Yes, I found that the exterior was the worst side of his character," replied his friend, "but my difficulties were not quite ended. The old gentleman changed his mind frequently since then, and upon each occasion I have had some difficulty in bringing him round. In fact I quite anticipate a severe tussle with him about three days before the marriage, but eventually it will be all right."

"I sincerely hope so," replied John, smiling; "it would be awkward if he withdrew his consent at the last moment."

"He would have his wife and daughter to encounter them also," observed Mr. Anderson, laughingly. "They would be indignant if it was broken off at the very last moment."

The next evening they were strolling up and down the streets listening to the bands discoursing martial music, and watching the crowds of gaily-dressed people who thronged the pathways. The same excitement that John had observed before was still prevalent, and, if anything, was deepening and increasing. The chances of peace or war were discussed with the utmost fervour and interest, and the

feeling of the people in general was strongly in favour of war. There was a strong impression among them that the North would be compelled in a very short time to acknowledge their independence, and no one seemed to expect a long, harassing, and lingering struggle. The feverish excitement that always precedes a great national convulsion was strong upon them, and John wondered to himself as he passed to and fro among the crowds of eager talkers what would be the feelings and views of these people upon the same question a year afterwards.

"They seem to regard the war as a merry pastime more than anything else," he observed to his companion.

"You are quite mistaken," he replied, "there is deep and intense feeling everywhere with regard to it, and what you regard as mirth is only the expression of great and irrepressible excitement. These people will have to make great sacrifices however the fortune of war may turn, and not one of them will be wanting."

The month sped rapidly away, and a few

days before its expiration he received a letter from Mr. Hamilton, directing him to proceed to New York, on his way homewards, in order to transact some business there. The merchant added that he might act as he thought proper with reference to Mr. Anderson's proposal, but begged of him, if he accepted it, not to delay his return to Europe.

John carried this letter to Mr. Anderson, and, after a little discussion, he decided upon accepting the offer.

He remained in Charleston nine days longer, and then departed for New York. His parting with Mr. Anderson was most cordial, and even affectionate. Both were sorry to part, and both seemed to feel that they would not meet again.

"After the troubles are over," were the parting words of the merchant as they stood before the Mill House, "I will bring my wife to England to see you. Until then adieu!"

The brave-hearted fellow perished in the great struggle before Richmond, and the girl he had wooed and almost won married a Northern soldier.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE ELMS AGAIN.

Mr. HAMILTON was much alarmed at the great and abiding change which had taken place in his wife. She was silent and reserved, and appeared to shun his society, but she steadily refused to take medical advice, declaring it to be nothing more than a little temporary indisposition, which would speedily pass away.

To Louisa she was much the same as before. Her manner was more tender and affectionate, and she took more interest in the little plans and schemes that made up the sum of the girl's life. She would sit for hours together in the open air beneath the shade of some wide-spreading tree, whilst Louisa gathered flowers and leaves with which to adorn her beautiful stepmother's hair.

"I wonder if you are like my own mamma," the girl said, upon one of these occasions; "papa must have thought so when he pro-

posed to you. I should like so much to see her picture."

Mr. Hamilton had removed his first wife's portrait before his second marriage, and it was now packed up in his study. Louisa could never muster up courage enough to ask permission to see it.

"From what I have heard of your mamma, my child," replied Mrs. Hamilton, gently, "she was very beautiful and very good. You must try to be like her, Louisa."

"I wish I could remember her," said the girl, musingly; "and yet I remember the day when she died. They sent for me to her room, and she kissed me and cried, and then papa sent me away. The house was so quiet and still for such a long time afterwards, and papa was very cross and would not speak to me. But I cannot remember her face. Nurse used to say that I was very like her."

The tears were falling fast over Mrs. Hamilton's cheeks. She pitied this motherless girl from the bottom of her heart, and the wealth of love that lay dormant within was ready to be expended upon this orphan,

solitary amongst her friends, ever thinking of the mother who had departed for ever.

"You must not think of such things, Louisa," she said very tenderly. "Your mother is far happier than either you or I, and you ought to be glad that she is not in the middle of this world of troubles."

"Is it a world of troubles, mamma?" said Louisa, looking wonderingly up into her face; "have you had a deal of trouble?"

"Yes, Louisa," she replied, gently, "more trouble than you can imagine. And I feel so tired."

She seemed weary as she sat there in the golden sunshine pale and wan. Even the pride that once flashed in her eyes was gone now—she was only a dispirited, despairing woman.

"You are nervous and ill, mamma," said Louisa, soothingly. "The Elms is such a gloomy, lonely place. We will go away somewhere, mamma, for a whole day, and you shall sit by the river side and watch the sheep feeding, and I will gather blackberries. Oh, it will be so nice."

She clapped her hands with childish glee,

and skipped merrily about. Presently she came back again.

"Shall we go, mamma?" she asked. "It will do you good, you know, and the country is so pleasant now."

"We will go if you wish it, Louisa," replied Mrs. Hamilton, with a smile. "When do you wish to go?"

"To-morrow, mamma," was the eager reply; "the servants can get everything ready to-day, and we can tell papa to-night."

Mrs. Hamilton agreed in the proposed arrangement, and they returned to the house. Louisa immediately began to look up a suitable dress for the occasion, and Mrs. Hamilton proceeded to issue directions for a small hamper of provisions to be got ready.

Louisa ran half-way down the avenue to meet her father that evening, and communicated the great intelligence to him.

"Going into the country, are you?" he said, with an amused smile. "Why, you surely do not imagine that you are in the town here?"

"Of course not, papa," she said, with a half-indignant laugh; "but I mean into the

real country, without any houses to be seen at all—nothing but green fields, and cows and sheep.”

“Well, my dear, you are quite welcome to go,” he said, amused at her earnestness. “I am sorry I cannot go with you, but Grimson can come if you like.”

“That horrid man!” exclaimed Louisa, indignantly. “He makes mamma quite ill whenever he comes near her. I wish you would turn him away.”

“I cannot turn him away, my dear,” replied her father, laughingly, “because he is not a favourite with you. He is a very good manager.”

“I hope he will stay at the office, then,” observed Louisa; “no one wishes to see him here.”

“I am sorry Grimson is not a favourite of your’s,” replied her father, “but I know someone who is. Young Raymond, whom you liked so much, is on his way home from America. That interests you, does it?”

“Very much, papa,” replied Louisa, with a blush; “I wish he was here to come with us to-morrow.”

The merchant entered the house and sought his wife's chamber. He was accustomed to go there now immediately upon his return, and his wife always greeted him with an eager, doubtful look that puzzled him. She was wondering whether the manager had fulfilled his threat. He was not a demonstrative man, but he loved to come up there and take her in his arms though she shuddered in his embrace. His love was too great, however, to allow him to doubt for a moment that this affection was returned—had she not pledged herself at the altar to love him, and that was enough for him. He did not dream, until it was too late, that he had no place in her proud, passionate heart, and that he had never discovered the way to gain her affections. This lesson came afterwards, and it was very bitter to him.

He clasped her in his arms this evening as usual, and kissed her fevered brow. "I do not know what I shall do with you, darling," he said, in a low, tender voice that pained his listener, for she felt that his love found no response in her heart. "I cannot afford to lose you, and yet you do not get well and strong."

"It is the excessive heat," she murmured faintly; "when the weather becomes colder I shall be better."

He was easily satisfied, and he really believed that this was the cause of her indisposition. She was pained sometimes when she reflected how easily he was deceived.

"Louisa has a wonderful scheme on foot," he said, laying her down on the couch; "she intends taking you into the country, as she says, and assures me that it will do you good."

"She is bent upon going," replied Mrs. Hamilton, with a faint smile, "and perhaps it may do me good. It is very dull here sometimes when you are away."

She did not intend to make an affectionate speech, but he regarded it as such, and was greatly pleased. It was not often, he thought, that she vouchsafed so large a crumb of tenderness.

The next day was gloriously fine, and Louisa was up with the lark. She was dressed and almost ready to start before the domestics were fairly up, and when she found that three

or four hours must elapse before they could set off, she ran into the woods to collect a bunch of wild flowers for the breakfast-table. This task occupied her attention until the bell rang.

Mr. Hamilton alone made his appearance at the morning meal. Mrs. Hamilton was resting in order to encounter the fatigues of the day, and did not wish to be disturbed for another hour. This was another little disappointment for Louisa, but she bore it bravely, and descanted to her father throughout the meal on the pleasure she expected to experience during the day. Breakfast being over, Mr. Hamilton was driven away with a parting injunction to Louisa to take care of herself.

Mrs. Hamilton was not ready to start until nearly eleven, but at last all the preparations were ended, the pony-carriage was at the door, the hamper of provisions was placed inside, and the servant stood ready to drive them away. Louisa sat behind, and Mrs. Hamilton and the man were in front.

The spot which had been selected as the scene of their visit was a small wood some

eight miles from the Elms. A stream of water flowed through it, and wild flowers and blackberries were very plentiful. It was a favourite resort of picnics, and Mrs. Hamilton thought it probable they might meet with some upon this occasion.

The drive was very pleasant, and Louisa was constantly discovering objects of admiration. At one time it was some rare wild plant or flower, at another some prettily situated cottage or farmhouse. She amused herself also by tossing halfpence to the children who rushed out to stare upon them, and conducted herself generally in a way that her father would have thought indecorous. It was, however, the first real holiday she ever had, for hitherto she had always been under her father's strict supervision whenever he chose to take her for a visit or excursion. His presence always had a chilling effect upon her, so that it was a new and delightful sensation to be entirely free and at liberty.

They reached the wood and found it in its pristine silence. There were no visitors except themselves, and although Louisa was

rather sorry, Mrs. Hamilton was pleased. She did not feel strong enough to meet strangers, and much preferred a few hours of peaceful rest to the boisterous gaiety which she knew was to be found among the picnic parties who frequented the wood. The hamper was unpacked, and the cloth laid upon the soft green grass, and Mrs. Hamilton and Louisa enjoyed the meal exceedingly. When it was over Louisa started off to gather blackberries, taking a small tin can with her to hold the fruit, and Mrs. Hamilton wandered into the wood.

A strange silence seemed to prevail, nor did the birds sing so merrily as in the open air. It was rather dark too, and the rippling sound of the streamlet was but melancholy music. She was rather tired, and sat down on the roots of a huge oak to rest herself, and leaning her head upon her hand she gave herself up to thought.

Suddenly she became conscious of the presence of some one near her, and, looking up, she perceived a man standing before her—a short, meanly-dressed man with shabby

threadbare clothes and a remarkably greasy hat. His face was wrinkled and yellow as parchment, and his fingers were long and clawlike, and seemed to be ever clutching at some imaginary object. His forehead was remarkably low, and his eyes were of a dull grey hue, and far sunk in his head.

He was not a pleasant man to meet in a dark and lonely wood, but Mrs. Hamilton exhibited no fear. She knew this little man, and although she was greatly surprised at his visit, no other feeling could be detected in her countenance.

"Father!" she said, in surprise, when first she looked up.

"I wonder that you acknowledge me at all," he replied with a grin; "you are so high and mighty now that you never inquire after the old place, not even after your sister."

"You cannot be surprised at that," she said, coldly, "since you yourself made the compact with Mr. Hamilton that my old associations were to be completely left behind. I was only too glad to do so, but still your

cannot blame me because the arrangement was made, it was your own act."

"I know it was my own act," he replied angrily; "but I did not imagine that you were going to observe it so rigidly. I expected to see you sometimes, and had no idea that my own daughter would try to forget me."

"Your own daughter, as you call me," was the calm reply, "does not forget you, but she regards you with the greatest possible contempt, and has no wish to see you intruding upon her. That is plain speaking, my respected parent."

"Yes, it is plain speaking," he cried, with an oath; "and I tell you that you cannot get rid of me so easily. Do you think that I would plot and scheme and struggle to get you into your present position for nothing? Do you imagine that I will submit to be coolly passed by?"

"I do not see how you can help yourself," she replied, with a sneer; "I must remind you, however, that you received a very handsome price for me from Mr. Hamilton. I know the amount."

This was a home-thrust, and he could not parry it.

"Why do you dog my footsteps?" she demanded sternly; "do you expect me to break the covenant you yourself made and again stoop to associate with you? You may be my father for aught I know to the contrary, although I doubt it sometimes; but father or not, I am not disposed to submit to a system of persecution."

"I will tell you what I want," he said, with a hideous leer, "and you will find that I am your father whatever you may think or say to the contrary. I want money, and you must get it for me."

"I tell you plainly," was the emphatic reply, "that you will never get a halfpenny from me. If you want money you must earn it like other people or be without it."

"I will neither earn it nor be without it," he replied coolly; "you must get it me or else I shall be arrested for debt."

"It is a matter of very little consequence to me whether you are arrested or not," Mrs. Hamilton said, haughtily; "you are always in

difficulties, and it is no use attempting to set you free from them. You persist in running into debt, and now you must take the consequences."

"If that is the only consolation you have to offer me," he said, with a grin, "I am sorry for your own sake. I did not intend to be unpleasant when I came, but you have forced me to it, and I tell you that if the money is not forthcoming I shall have a little interview with your husband and make certain statements to him."

She laughed aloud in scorn.

"This is another contrivance of the manager's, is it?" she said, tauntingly; "I suspected as much from the beginning. You will have an interview with my husband, you say? Does it occur to you that if you were as good as your word and told him the whole story you refer to, that he would kick you from the house. If he was deceived, was it not you that planned and executed the deceit? On your head the penalty must fall."

This view of the question was evidently a new one to him, for his tone was much quieter

and less harsh than before when he again spoke.

"That is true," he replied, "but he could do nothing to punish me. I have done nothing that the law takes cognizance of, and the unpleasant consequences would fall upon *you*."

"Even admitting that," she said, calmly, "what benefit would this be to you? Even if my husband separated from me, would that put a single penny into your pocket?"

"No, it would not," he answered, defiantly, "but if you are determined to cast away my claims upon you, it would be a satisfaction to me to feel that you were suffering for it."

"If that is the case," she said, quite unmoved, "you may have this satisfaction whenever you choose. I shall not stir a finger to help you, and I do not care if you are shut up for a time in prison. It will do you good, and teach you to keep out of debt for the future."

"You are a very affectionate daughter," he said, spitefully—"so loving and amiable—quite an example to your step-daughter."

"Who taught me to be so?" she asked, sneeringly. "I have only learnt the lessons you taught me too well, and now you complain of the fruit they bear. You alone are to blame for it."

"You are rolling in wealth," he said, as if determined to adopt a new line of argument, "and yet you will not procure the paltry hundred pounds which would save me from a debtor's prison. Why, one of those rings that you wear would bring as much."

There was a covetous gleam in his eyes that made them almost greenish, and Mrs. Hamilton really feared that he would attempt to deprive her of her jewellery.

"Let me tell you plainly," she said, resolutely, "if you attempt to lay your finger upon one of these rings, or anything else belonging to me, I will have you sent into penal servitude for the rest of your days. It would not be a bad way of getting rid of you."

He actually trembled before this bold, haughty woman, who understood him so well, and who cared so little for his threats.

He would have gone away from her presence

but that his need was really urgent, and he still hoped she would give him the money.

"If you will not give it for my sake," he said, more humbly, "remember your sister—she will be turned adrift upon the world."

These were the very words the manager used in their memorable conversation, and a new light seemed to break upon her.

"Mr. Grimson is your creditor," she said, "and, no doubt, he thinks that he will bend me to his wicked will by shutting you up in prison, or, at all events, he will annoy me through you. If I paid this money, he would be your creditor again before six months were over, and the same thing would be repeated. He must do as he pleases—I cannot help you."

A light footstep was heard approaching through the wood, and, with a last glance of vindictive hate, the man disappeared as suddenly as he came. He was not a moment too soon, for Louisa came bounding up almost before the rustling of the leaves, caused by his retreating footsteps, had ceased.

"How well you are looking, mamma," she exclaimed, for there was a flush of excitement

in Mrs. Hamilton's countenance that might pass for the glow of health and warmth; "the walk has done you good already."

"I feel tired nevertheless," replied her step-mother, who dreaded lest the man who had just left her might be listening to their conversation. "I think we will go back now, Louisa."

They returned to the field, and remained there, sitting in the cool shade of the trees for another hour, and then refreshments were again placed before them.

When the meal was ended the servant was despatched for the pony and carriage, which had been left at a small farm-house near at hand.

Mrs. Hamilton drove on the return journey, and Louisa sat in front with her, whilst the servant, with the hamper, was placed behind. Both Mrs. Hamilton and the girl were rather silent on the way. The latter was a little tired, and warm. The former was greatly troubled at this new move on the manager's part, and she believed that he would be as good as his word, and would send her father to prison.

Still she would not help him. She could not bring herself to believe that the man was her father, for she knew nothing of her early history, had never known a mother's love and care, and there was the widest difference in appearance, taste, and manners, between her and the girl who remained at home looking after the old man's shop. She was not romantic enough to believe that her parents were of high position, or to indulge in any similar fancies. She believed, or rather surmised, that she had been confided to this man's care by her parents, who, for some reason or other, wished to dispose of her. Several little incidents occurred from time to time before her marriage to confirm this supposition, and she sometimes thought that Mr. Hamilton was acquainted with the true facts of the case.

Be that as it might, however, she would not assist this man. The manager was cunning and skilful enough to entangle his victim again in a very short time, and thus a constant drain of her resources would be kept up. Whatever might be the consequences, she would leave him to his fate.

The smoke of the great town could be seen in the distance like a funeral pall hanging over the great mass of human beings who resided there.

"How fortunate we are, mamma!" murmured Louisa, in a low voice, as she looked upon it; "we have not to be in constant anxiety about the very means of life like the poor people over yonder."

"No, we are certainly free from that," replied her mother; "but I doubt if we are any happier than they are. We have very many troubles and ills to bear that they know nothing of. I think the balance of happiness is on their side."

"I should not like to change places with them, at any rate," said Louisa, with a pretty shrug of her shoulders, which she was fond of indulging in; "it must be so dull and wretched living in a great smoky town like that all day."

"Perhaps it is," replied Mrs. Hamilton; "but if everybody lived in the country, Louisa, there would be no towns. Would that suit you better?"

"Oh, no, that would never do," cried Louisa, in dismay; "there would be no shops, books, fashions—nothing, in fact."

Mrs. Hamilton was amused by the girl's alarm, and, in conversation of this kind, they whiled away the time until they arrived at The Elms.

Mr. Hamilton had not yet returned. He expected that they would remain at the wood until late in the afternoon, and that they would not reach home until the evening was somewhat advanced.

Mrs. Hamilton proceeded to her room, and opened her letters, which did not reach The Elms until noon. There were several from lady friends, a milliner's circular, a programme of a forthcoming bazaar and concert, and also a plain blue business envelope, addressed in a clear, legible hand, without any attempt at flourishes or ornament—a handwriting that she had never seen before.

She opened it with slow and trembling hands, for she guessed that this unknown correspondent had something unpleasant to say. The paper was a plain sheet of ordinary

note paper, and there was neither date, address, nor signature. She had no difficulty, however, in determining the source from whence it came. The words it contained were unequivocal and intelligible.

"Consent to my proposal," the writer said, "or have your father arrested to-morrow for debt, and your home broken up. This is the first step in the scheme of my vengeance."

She sat at the open window looking out into the garden, and her eyes were fixed upon these words. They contained no new threat, as she had dreaded, only a reiteration of what she had heard from the writer of this note himself, and also from her father that morning.

"What a weak, miserable creature he must take me to be!" she thought, and a proud smile of contempt played upon her lips. "He must think that I am mad if he seriously expects me to forsake my husband and my home and join him, simply because a man who calls himself my father, and for whom I care nothing, is to be arrested for debt. As I told him this morning, it will be the very best thing that ever happened to him."

She glanced at the sheet again, and a new idea occurred to her.

"The first step, is it!" she thought; "I wonder how many more there are, Mr. Grimson, or whatever you choose to call yourself. I think it is time that I carried the war into the enemy's camp. I am not the only one whose past contains some dark passages."

She had completely shaken off the weary lassitude that oppressed her before, and she seemed as strong as ever. She felt that it was no time for weakness and indecision, for her enemies were gathering around her, and the excitement of the fight nerved her more than any medicine could have done.

"If they wish to fight," she said, with flashing eyes, "I must be ready for them; a woman's ready wit will conquer a dozen of them. I will give him fair warning, however, of what he is to expect."

She tore away the blank half sheet from his letter, and, going to her desk, she wrote in a feigned hand, which her most intimate friend would not have recognized:—

“Take care ; you are treading on a volcano, and sowing a storm for yourself.”

Mr. Grimson pondered long and anxiously over this message when he received it. He guessed rightly that she was about to act aggressively, and the prospect was not a pleasant one. The week passed away, and Mrs. Hamilton's father was still at liberty. The manager had not yet executed his threat.

CHAPTER VIII.

COLLAPSE OF THE MYNYDD MAWR LEAD COMPANY, LIMITED.

FOR a time after the conversation which we narrated between Mr. Robson and the Secretary—the “indefatigable secretary,” as the directors called him in one of their circulars—the affairs of the company went on prosperously. The reports of the captain were still of a glowing character, and shareholders were duly furnished with copies of these documents. There were one or two shrewd business men who had embarked in the speculation, and who did not like the way in which the affairs of the company were transacted, and these determined to have a full investigation at the forthcoming quarterly meeting of shareholders. The unbusiness-like habits of the secretary were the means of first arousing suspicion, but the good souls who determined to have this investigation had no conception

of the thoroughly rotten nature of the whole concern. They anticipated disclosures of bad management and reckless administration, but they never imagined that the Mynydd Mawr Mine was as nearly a myth as it could well be.

The shareholders met, and the needy baronet, who had been brought down from London by Robson, with the object of intimidating audacious and unruly members of the meeting, was voted into the chair. The report, which Randall read in a bold, unctuous voice, contained promises of a handsome dividend, and congratulated the shareholders upon the great success which had crowned their efforts. The reading of this document was received with considerable applause, and Randall brightened greatly, for he dreaded some unpleasant scene at this meeting.

A shareholder rose and put a series of embarrassing questions as to the quantity of lead which had been raised, the way in which it was disposed of, and the price it brought. Randall's answers were vague and unsatisfactory, and the questioner then addressed the

meeting, remarking upon the meagreness of the information supplied—information which they, as shareholders largely interested in the success of the mine, had a right to demand. He therefore proposed that a committee of three independent shareholders should be formed to examine the affairs of the company, and to proceed to the mine to inquire into the actual state of affairs.

Randall was greatly alarmed at this proposal, but he could not prudently oppose it without increasing the suspicions of the proposer and his supporters. He therefore sat quietly, and offered no remark whatever upon the suggestion. The baronet, who, to do him justice, was not aware of the true state of affairs, saw no objection to this course, but Mr. Robson, who was the next speaker, opposed it. He was, he said, as largely interested in the success of the mine as any one present, being the holder of a great number of shares, and he was, therefore, anxious to have it properly managed, but he would regard the passing of the resolution as equivalent to a vote of want of confidence in the

directors. He was, himself, quite satisfied that the mine was worked in the best manner possible, although he had not himself inspected it, and he saw no reason for instituting an inquiry of this kind at so early a period in the history of the company. His speech was an effective one; but the resolution was passed by a large majority, and three shareholders were consequently appointed to hold the suggested investigation.

There was a long and anxious consultation in Arranmore Street that evening between Randall and Mr. Robson.

"It is time for you to take up your bed and walk," said the latter, in his usual cool, unruffled manner; "the company will not last another week."

"Is there no way of holding out another three months?" asked Randall, despairingly.

"None whatever," replied the other; "these fellows will go down to South Wales in a day or two, and will discover the real state of things."

"But there are men working there," observed Randall, who wished to avert the ruin

which was imminent, "and they will find everything in working order."

He really believed that the captain had fulfilled his instructions. From first to last the company was based upon a system of mutual deceit.

"They will find no lead," replied Robson, "and that will prove we have been deceiving them. The people of the neighbourhood will tell them that none was ever found there."

Randall was silent; he could not overcome this difficulty.

"I need not ask if you followed my advice and removed Mrs. Smith and your furniture away," said Mr. Robson; "you see now that I was right in suggesting it."

"I have not followed it," confessed Randall; "I did not think the crisis would come so soon."

"Then, my dear fellow, you are in a most serious predicament," said the other, coolly; "all your goods will be seized by the liquidators."

"You are precisely in the same position,"

replied Randall, angrily ; " you will be prosecuted for wilfully defrauding the shareholders. I shall not go on my travels alone at any-rate."

" You are quite mistaken, my dear Randall," said Robson, in the same self-possessed, unmoved manner ; " the directors have been grossly deceived by the secretary and the engineer. They were under the impression that the mine was a good one, and that they would realize large profits. You alone are responsible, now that Hewitt has disappeared, for his evidence alone could criminate me."

" But what if Hewitt makes his appearance?" asked Randall, anxious to find a weak point in the armour in which this master-villain had encased himself.

" He is not likely to do so for his own sake," replied Robson ; " if he had nothing to fear, he would, no doubt, come forward, for I believe, from what I heard him say a week ago, that he has taken a pious turn, and no doubt he has either left the country, or is on the point of doing so. I am perfectly safe."

• " If I am caught," said Randall, savagely,

"I will make a clean breast of the whole affair. I should like to have your company in prison if I am sent there."

"No doubt you would, my dear fellow," replied Robson, sneeringly, "we might arrange some new scheme of unlimited liability; but I should have the same chance of escape as you have now, and it strikes me that I would not be easily taken. You forget, however, that the evidence against me would be very slight indeed—in the hands of a clever lawyer, my case would be a capital instance of injured innocence. My character would go for something, too, but you do not happen to be blessed with anything of the kind."

"There are several little matters of this kind with which you have been connected, that would tell against you with a jury," said Randall, maliciously; "you would not like to have your secrets exposed to the view of the public."

"Perhaps not, my dear fellow," said Robson, "but I really do not see the use of discussing the question just now. Of course we expected things to come to a crisis eventually, although

not quite so soon, and we have only to do now what we would have done then. We certainly did not expect the company to last very long, and perhaps it is just as well that the collapse comes now. I was prepared for it, and I do not see anything to alarm us in the prospect before us."

This man had seen too much trouble and difficulties to be dismayed at a mere trifle, as he regarded this affair.

The risk and danger connected with this and similar speculations invested them with a charm in his eyes, and he looked upon them as so many games of chance in which he had hitherto been invariably successful.

It was not so with Randall Smith. He was a thorough coward, physically and morally, and although he knew perfectly that the storm must come sooner or later, it unnerved him when it came. He was unable to look a danger in the face, or to contrive means of safety even for himself, and a peril like this which menaced him, now filled him with abject terror, although he had deliberately brought it upon himself, and had looked for-

ward to it for the preceding three months. He was, in fact, a useful tool in the hands of a man like Robson, who contrived the mischief which he left to others to carry out.

"It is all very well for you to talk," he muttered, discontentedly; "you are not in the mess, or at least you are not so deeply in as I am, and have time to scheme. What am I to do? That is what I cannot determine."

"I will tell you, if you will have patience," replied Robson, rather impatiently, for the complete helplessness of his colleague annoyed him greatly; "there is a large sum of money in the office which you drew for working expenses. That must be brought here and equally divided between us. That is the first step."

"It is evident that you will reap the benefit from the company, while I run nearly all the risk," said Randall, who wished to appropriate the whole of this sum, if possible.

"We will not discuss that question again," was the impatient reply; "we settled that long ago. If you persist in throwing obstacles in my way, I shall let you take your own

course, and get out of it as well as you can."

This threat had a salutary effect upon Randall. Without Robson's advice he could never extricate himself.

"Go on, then," he said, sullenly.

"This division must take place to-night, for it is quite possible that these three men may go down to South Wales to-morrow, and you may depend upon it that the true state of matters will be telegraphed to the other shareholders at once," continued Robson; "the sooner, therefore, you start the better. If you go to-night, you will have at least three days' start, and that ought to take you out of the kingdom."

"It will be known at the office to-morrow that I have absconded," objected Randall.

"Not if you manage the matter properly," replied Robson; "send for the chief clerk to your place, tell him that you are going down to the mine with the committee to-morrow, and that you will not be back for two or three days. Give him a good supper, entertain him well, and start immediately after he leaves you."

Randall agreed to this proposal, and started immediately for the office, in order to procure the money. This he took to Robson's residence, and it was equally divided between them.

"It did not occur to me to ask you before," observed Randall, "where am I to go?"

"Anywhere, my dear fellow," replied Robson—"America, Timbuctoo; it really does not matter."

"It matters very much to me," replied Randall, ruefully, "because I must leave Mrs. Smith behind, and I should like to be as near her as is consistent with my safety."

"I am surprised to hear a sensible man like you making such a remark," sneered Robson; "there are plenty of women in the world, and the loss of one ought not to make much difference."

"She has stuck to me in all my troubles," said Randall, resolutely, "and I am not going to desert her."

"France, then, will suit you very well," said Robson; "I should go to Paris, or to Boulogne. Paris would be the better place."

"Paris, then, it shall be," responded Randall; "and now I must wish you good-bye. You will let me hear from you, and advise me when it will be safe to return."

"I shall certainly do so," replied Robson, coming with him to the door; "I am sorry that you are obliged to leave; your assistance would be valuable in a short time in that other scheme."

"Yes, I should like to assist, but it is out of the question," said Randall. "I hope you will succeed this time, and that your object will be gained at last. And now good-bye."

They shook hands in the twilight at the garden gate, and parted, Robson to plan fresh schemes and stratagems, Randall to start on his continental journey.

He did not neglect Robson's advice this time. He sent for the chief clerk, and explained to him in an apparently confidential manner that it was necessary for him to accompany the committee which had been appointed to the mine. He said that he wished to satisfy himself by personal inspection that every-

thing was going on properly. The clerk applauded this determination on his part, and informed him further that the committee did not intend to start until the second day. This, the clerk remarked, would give the secretary a clear day to prepare for their visit. A nicely prepared supper was then brought in, and Randall played his part admirably. The unsuspecting clerk could scarcely realize afterwards that the man who sat opposite to him, and entertained him with his funniest stories, was on the point of going into exile in ruin and disgrace.

The supper was over at last, and the clerk went away well satisfied with the cheer that he had partaken of. The door had scarcely closed behind him before a scene of great confusion was visible in the house. Randall informed his wife of the urgent necessity there was for flight, and that she must be left behind for the time, an arrangement which was not at all pleasing to that lady. She fell on her husband's neck, and even went upon her knees before him, imploring him not to forsake her, but he knew perfectly well that

he would be incurring unnecessary danger by hampering himself with her, and he was therefore deaf to her entreaties.

His portmanteau was packed in a very few minutes—it was but a small one, and Randall's wardrobe was not an extensive one. He carried it in his hand, and then bade his wife farewell. The poor helpless woman was in sore distress at parting with him, but he promised to send for her in a short time, and with this promise he turned away. There was a night mail for London soon after eleven, and he intended travelling by it. He had more than three-quarters of an hour to wait, and as he did not wish to attract public attention by loafing about at the railway station, he spent the intervening time in walking up and down the deserted streets.

Almost at the last moment he entered the station, took his ticket, and seated himself in a second-class carriage, of which he was the only occupant. By the aid of a key, which he always carried with him, he locked the carriage door, and then felt tolerably secure from recognition. To increase his security he

muffled himself up closely and closed the carriage windows, and then, with a beating heart, he awaited the departure of the train.

A few minutes only elapsed, the last remaining open door was closed with a bang, the guard whistled, some one cried "All right," and then the train was on its way, bearing Mr. Randall Smith and his fortunes with it. He had but little cause for fear now, but nevertheless his heart almost stood still every time the train stopped, lest he should be recognized and taken back.

He bitterly regretted, as most evil doers are accustomed to do, that he had ever entered into the scheme which Robson had so cunningly contrived, and which, by a combination of circumstances, met with such surprising success. Both Robson and he were gainers to a large extent by the affair, but nothing could compensate Randall for the loss of home, wife, boon companions, and his country. He also felt that for the first time in his eventful history he was amenable to the law, and that his offence might be brought against him years hence in all probability. It

was not a cheering prospect ; flight and exile, with the fear of the law before one's eyes, are not pleasant to contemplate, even for a brave man ; but Randall was not a brave man—he was an arrant coward. They reached London in the dawn of another day, and as Randall alighted from the carriage he caught a glimpse of the baronet, who had travelled from Liverpool by the same train. As yet he had not been seen by the director, and he quickly turned away and disappeared into a waiting-room, where he remained until the baronet had left the station. In another hour he was on his way to Dover, through the fair Kentish country, where peaceful homesteads and villages were smiling beneath the warm, balmy sunshine.

He reached Paris safely, and took up his quarters in a third-rate street, where he would be less likely to attract attention. In the meantime the company was hurrying rapidly to ruin. On the morning after Randall's flight, the committee called at the office, and they looked significantly one at the other when they learned that the secretary had gone to

the mine. They suspected that his object was to prepare matters for their reception, and with the view of allowing him as little time as possible for this purpose, they determined to follow him that day.

The captain had been forewarned by a telegram from Randall, which he despatched from London. It was brief, but very significant:—

“If things are not all right, be off at once. You will have visitors in a day or two if you remain.”

The worthy captain received this message with philosophical indifference.

“Discretion is the better part of valour,” he thought, “and I can do no good by holding my ground. If I throw these fellows down the mine, how much better should I be? and they would be much the worse for it. I shall slope. I wonder who these visitors are. Police, I suppose. The indefatigable secretary has taken his walking ticket, anyhow. Well, here’s another fellow off.”

The captain’s personal property was compressible into a very small space, and hastily collecting it, he sent for a horse and spring

cart, to convey him at once to the nearest railway station, where he loudly expressed his intention of remaining until some visitors whom he expected arrived. When the cart had returned, however, the captain took a ticket for a small station about twenty miles away, where he alighted and took another ticket for London, as if he had just come into the station instead of alighting from the train.

He was in some of his old haunts in the metropolis the next day, and quite regardless of the interests of the company and all connected with it.

Upon the same day the committee of investigation arrived on the spot which the captain had just deserted, and they found no traces of any work having been done at all beyond raising a shed and clearing a little around the shaft. The whole thing was clearly a swindle, and when they visited the proprietor of the land he narrated the conversation he had had with their secretary, and added that every one in the village was perfectly well aware that not an ounce of lead

could be found, even if it had been properly worked.

“Knowing this,” said one of the committee, “was it not your duty, as an honest man, to represent the state of matters to the shareholders?”

“I was quite ignorant even of the name of the town where the company’s offices were situated,” replied the farmer, “and I was by no means sure that a limited liability company was at all connected with it. I considered then, and am still of the same opinion, that, under the circumstances, I had done my duty, and more than many men similarly situated would have done, in warning the secretary of the folly of working a mine that contained no lead, nor anything else of value.”

The members of the committee were compelled to admit that there was considerable force in this view, and as nothing more could be done they prepared to return. It was not until they were on the road to the station that one of them asked suddenly:—

“Where was the secretary? I thought he had gone to the mine.”

The three were silent for a few minutes, and then another spoke.

"He has absconded, to a dead certainty," he said; "the rascal saw that his game was up."

"Do you think he was the sole originator of the swindle?" asked another.

"Had the directors anything to do with it?"

"I think not," replied the first speaker; "they are good names, I believe—at least I know nothing against any of them. Some of them are far heavier losers than we are—Robson, for instance."

"By the way, who is he?" asked the other.

"I really know but little about him, and no one seems to know much more," replied the first. "I believe he was in business formerly, but retired. He lives in a handsome house, and appears to be well off. He is never seen about the town, and could not, therefore, know very much about this concern. He has burned his fingers severely, I believe."

Robson had carefully circulated the report that he held a large number of shares, and so he did, but they had never been paid for, although the amount appeared as actually

received in the books of the company. This report was of immense service to him in the subsequent inquiry, and the shareholders sympathized with rather than blamed him, although the other directors who only held a few shares were censured for their gross negligence and credulity.

The news of the collapse of the company caused a prodigious sensation amongst men upon 'Change, who were, with but very few exceptions, inclined to believe in the soundness of the speculation. A noisy and turbulent meeting of shareholders was held, in which the directors were strongly censured, but the blame was laid at the door of the secretary and the engineer, neither of whom could be found. There was an angry discussion as to their prosecution, but no definite resolution was arrived at.

And thus the Mynydd Mawr Lead Company (Limited) passed away. It re-appeared occasionally in the form of a paragraph in a corner of one of the local papers, but its very existence was soon forgotten except by those who were sufferers from it.

CHAPTER IX.

AT HOME AGAIN.

A NOBLE steamer came rapidly up the Mersey with its living freight of passengers, eager to tread once more upon English ground. Among them was John, who stood gazing attentively on the old familiar landmarks and places from which he had been absent only about four months, but which seemed an age to him.

He expected to find Mr. Hamilton awaiting him, but he was disappointed. The merchant had been wrongly informed as to the probable time the steamer would arrive, and was not therefore upon the spot to greet his young friend and agent upon his return to England.

John was burdened with a quantity of luggage, and he therefore called a cab, and was driven to his lodgings. After a hasty meal he walked down to the office, but was told that Mr. Hamilton had just gone down

to the docks to meet him. The manager, however, was in, and John decided upon seeing him. He was therefore shown into Mr. Grimson's room, and they had a long conversation, which lasted until Mr. Hamilton returned.

The greetings between the merchant and John were warm, almost affectionate.

"Your journey has done you good," said Mr. Hamilton, when they were together in his private room, "and I must say that you executed your commission admirably."

"I am glad that I have gained your approval, sir," John replied, respectfully; "I found it a more difficult task than I anticipated."

"I am quite satisfied with the whole cargoes," continued Mr. Hamilton, "and, judging from the latest advices from America, it will prove a profitable speculation. What was the state of feeling when you left?"

"Warlike," replied John; "the dispute must, in my opinion, be decided by a war."

"It will make our fortunes, at all events, my dear Raymond," said Mr. Hamilton,

rubbing his hands cheerily together. "By the way, did you accept Anderson's offer?"

"Yes, sir," replied John; "acting upon your kind permission, I undertook to see it stored here until it can be advantageously sold?"

"Has it arrived?" asked the merchant.

"No, it has not, sir," replied John; "it was stored upon a plantation of his somewhere in the country, and he would have to bring it to Charleston for embarkation. It will not be here for another month. Has all your cotton been warehoused?"

"Yes," replied the merchant, "it was warehoused immediately upon its arrival, for I did not wish it to be known generally that I had purchased a great quantity like this, lest others might be tempted to follow my example."

"How long do you think we must hold it back, sir?" asked John, anxiously.

"About six or nine months after war has fairly commenced," replied Mr. Hamilton. "I suppose you are anxious to handle your share of the profits."

"I shall certainly be glad when I can do so," replied John, with a smile ; "ready money is better than any amount of prospects."

"You are quite right," answered Mr. Hamilton, rattling the silver in his pocket, "but in this case we can scarcely call it a prospect or a speculation now. Cotton must increase greatly in value if war is declared, as there appears every likelihood it will be. If you want money beyond your salary for any purpose I will give you a cheque. From me and the cotton entrusted to you by Mr. Anderson you will make a very large sum of money."

"I am very sensible of your kindness," replied John, gratefully, "but I really do not want any money just now, beyond my salary. I can afford to wait, and I would rather not spend money before I actually receive it."

They proceeded to examine various accounts and calculations which John had prepared, and an estimate of his expenses was handed in, which the merchant considered to be very moderate. When this business was over, it

was getting late in the afternoon, and Mr. Hamilton prepared to return home.

"You had better come over with me," he said to John, "the ladies will be glad to see you."

"I ought to apologise," said John, actually blushing with shame—"I have quite forgotten to ask how Mrs. and Miss Hamilton are?"

"We have been so busy," replied the merchant, with an indulgent smile; "it was impossible to think of everything. Louisa is quite well, and Mrs. Hamilton nearly so now, but since your departure she has been very unwell."

"What was the matter?" asked John, with some surprise. He had considered Mrs. Hamilton to be a woman above ordinary weaknesses.

"I really do not know," said Mr. Hamilton; "it appeared to be a combination of nervousness, low spirits, headaches, and many other things. But are you coming?"

"I am scarcely fit to present myself in this dress," replied John, looking down upon the rough suit he wore at sea, and which he had

not put off. "I think I had better go to my lodgings and change my dress and follow you to The Elms."

"It is no use standing upon ceremony," replied the merchant, good-humouredly ; "they would be glad to see you dressed as a North American Indian."

This last remark caused John to withdraw his opposition, and accordingly they entered the carriage and were driven away.

"Have you seen Mr. Grimson?" asked the merchant when they were fairly on their way.

"Yes, I have," replied John, briefly.

"He is a zealous and active manager," continued Mr. Hamilton. "I hope you will work well together."

"I do not suppose that he will have much to do with me, sir," said John. "By the way, how is Mr. Grenfell?"

"He is better, I think, than when you went away," replied Mr. Hamilton. "I see him about once a week, and Mr. Grimson also calls frequently."

"Does Mr. Grimson call upon him?" asked John, in a tone of apparent surprise.

"Yes, I believe they are on very good terms," replied Mr. Hamilton. "Mr. Grimson thinks highly of Grenfell, and values his opinion. Whenever he is in doubt upon any point he applies to Grenfell—not to me."

John did not seem disposed to discuss the new manager or his conduct, and he therefore changed the subject of conversation.

They were not long in reaching The Elms, and John's heart beat faster than usual as the carriage rolled up the avenue and stopped before the entrance.

Mr. Hamilton alighted and entered the house, followed closely by John. Louisa was sitting alone in the drawing-room when her father entered, and she did not see the second person who came in.

"I have brought a friend whom you will be glad to see, Louisa," her father said.

He turned round, and John advanced to the easy chair where she was sitting. She rose with a cry of surprise, and a burning blush suffused her face as she met his gaze.

"I am so glad to see you back again," was

all she said, and then she resumed her work to conceal her confusion.

Mr. Hamilton left the room to seek his wife, and when he was gone John said, in a half-reproachful voice :

“This is rather a cold reception to give me after so long an absence.”

“It is not because I am not very glad to see you,” she said, with a sweet smile which lit up her whole countenance. “I have often longed to see you back. It was so dull here without you.”

“I am rather surprised to hear that,” said John. “I was not a very frequent guest, you know.”

Louisa was silent. She did not know how to reply to this observation.

“I was sorry to hear of Mrs. Hamilton’s illness,” pursued John ; “it must have been a trial to you, for you would be deprived of her society then. I hope she has quite recovered.”

“Here she comes to speak for herself,” said Louisa, as the door opened and Mrs. Hamilton entered.

She was much the same as she appeared

when he had seen her last. Her dark eyes wandered a little restlessly sometimes, and her hands moved nervously. She was frequently absent-minded also, and seemed to be occupied with painful and anxious thoughts, but her manner was as stately and her beauty as brilliant as ever. She welcomed John with more warmth and cordiality even than her husband. Her friends were few in number, and she was not one who could associate intimately with every one; but when she took an interest in some one, her friendship was warm and abiding. She believed John to be a young man of unusual activity, and completely devoted to her husband's interests, and she thought that in her own troubled circumstances he might one day be of use. That day came much sooner than she anticipated.

"Your stay in the States was so much longer than you originally intended," she said, with an unusually pleasant smile, "we really began to think that you would never return."

"America was very much pleasanter than

I expected it would be under present circumstances," replied John, "but I had too many ties, or rather hopes and aspirations, in England, to be tempted to remain there."

He glanced towards Louisa, but that young lady was busily engaged with her work. Mr. Hamilton then proposed a stroll in the garden until dinner-time, and the ladies went in search of their hats.

The air was warm and rather sultry. Not a cloud could be seen in the sky, and everything seemed to feel the influence of the heat. The flowers were parched and half withered, notwithstanding Louisa's assiduity in watering them, and the roads, which could be seen stretching far away in the distance, were covered with clouds of dust, which gave even the hedgerows a white appearance. Further still was the sea upon which the sun was pouring a flood of light, which was reflected from the water like a pathway of gold over the waves.

It was too hot to walk about, and they sat down in the shade.

"You have been very successful, Mr.

Hamilton says," remarked Mrs. Hamilton to John; "you are making your fortune out of this war."

"It will be an exceedingly small one, then," replied John, with a smile; "fortunes are not so easily made."

Louisa was listening attentively, but she made no remark.

"It will be far more than any young man in your position ever had before," observed Mr. Hamilton; "it will be amply sufficient to enable you to take a partnership in almost any house."

"That may be the case," replied John; "but Mrs. Hamilton spoke as if it were my merit that procured it for me. It was simply the unusually favourable opportunity that you were kind enough to give me."

"Which he would never have given you unless he believed you deserving of it," said Mrs. Hamilton; "so that it is a question of merit after all."

The dinner-bell summoned them to return to the house, and John took the opportunity to fall behind a little with Louisa.

"I have brought you a present from the States," he said. "You see that I have not forgotten your slightest wish."

"I knew you would not," she replied, with a shy smile; "it is something very curious, I have no doubt."

"I am afraid it is not curious at all," he said. "I searched everywhere for a rare and valuable object which would interest you, but could find nothing more than what we have in Liverpool. I was nearly tempted once to bring you an Indian tomahawk!"

"What a frightful idea!" she replied, with a merry laugh; "you might as well have brought me a pair of moccasins also."

"There were plenty there to be got," he answered; "but this is what I selected."

He drew a small case from his breast-pocket, and opened it with a spring. Inside was a beautiful cross of diamonds, richly set and finished.

She uttered a cry of surprise and admiration when she saw the gift he had chosen, and looked up in his face with a curious expression of mingled gratitude, tenderness,

and fear, lest she should commit herself too far.

"How can I ever thank you," she said, softly, "for your beautiful present? I was only joking when I mentioned the matter to you before your departure. I did not think you would pay any attention to my heedless words."

"I am not likely to forget anything you say," he replied, earnestly—so earnestly that she blushed deeply as she listened. "I remembered some other words you spoke also, and they were pleasant to think about when I was very far away from The Elms."

She made no reply, for they were entering the house, and she found the situation rather an embarrassing one.

"You seem to have been greatly absorbed in your conversation," said Mr. Hamilton, good-humouredly; "what was the subject?"

"I was merely relating some of my American experiences for Miss Hamilton's benefit," replied John, with a not very strict adherence to truth.

He had no further opportunity for a *tete-*

a-tete with Louisa. The dinner passed off in the usual quiet, uneventful manner, and shortly afterwards John took his leave. He wished, he said, to call upon some of his friends that night, and although Mrs. Hamilton would have detained him, he was allowed to go.

When he returned to town, he called upon Mr. Grenfell. The ex-manager was sitting in an easy chair, idly turning over the pages of a book, and looking much better and stronger than when John saw him last. The room was pleasantly arranged, fresh flowers having been placed on the table, and the window was thrown wide open to admit the cool evening air. The change was great and striking, and John was greatly surprised and pleased to see it.

"I am very glad to find you looking so very much better," he said, as he entered. "I really thought when I was here last that I should never see you again, but you will outlive many of us young men yet."

"I do not think so," replied Mr. Grenfell, with a smile. "I shall not outlive you at anyrate. Your American trip has done you a great amount of good."

"Yes, I feel much better in every respect," replied John. "I have seen a good deal of the world, and acquired a fund of valuable experience."

"Experience was your chief want before you left England," observed his friend; "this objection will no longer stand in your way. Mr. Hamilton will no doubt make you his manager soon."

"He seems to be very well satisfied with his present one," replied John; "he spoke very highly of him to-day."

"I believe Mr. Grimson does his work thoroughly well," remarked his friend; "and Mr. Hamilton always appreciates thoroughness and painstaking."

"Then you agree with Mr. Hamilton's opinion," said John. "I confess I do not."

"I merely observed that Mr. Grimson did his work well," answered Mr. Grenfell; "no one can deny that; but in other respects I think him unsuitable for the position he holds."

"For instance?" said John, inquiringly.

"I do not think that he is a man to be

relied upon," was the reply. "I believe him to be crafty, cunning, and altogether a dangerous man."

"Do you think that he has any enmity towards Mr. Hamilton?" asked John. "He has enemies enough in Robson and his colleagues without incurring the resentment of any one else."

"I really do not know," replied Mr. Grenfell, with a perplexed air; "the whole matter really puzzles me. I am strongly of opinion sometimes that he is an enemy of his employer's, but I cannot conceive why he should be, unless he is connected with the Robson conspiracy, of which we have heard nothing since you went away. Mr. Hamilton seems fated to create enemies for himself."

"Robson is not so dormant as you imagine," remarked John, quietly. "I have reason to know that he has a very daring scheme on foot at this present moment. His vengeance has been long delayed, but he believes it will come at last."

"What is he doing?" asked Mr. Grenfell, with wonder and surprise in his voice.

"I am not at liberty to divulge my information just yet," replied John, "it would do no good, but rather harm. This much is pretty certain, however—that man will end his days in penal servitude."

"It would be too easy a life for him by far," remarked his friend, indignantly. "I do not see why the British taxpayer should be compelled to provide free board and lodging for a long term of years for every scoundrel who chooses to avail himself of it."

"I do not see what you could do with them," replied John. "It would not be safe to turn them loose upon society, neither could you starve them to death."

"That is perfectly true," answered Mr. Grenfell, "but why feed and clothe them as if their lives were precious and valuable, and give them the impression that if they died it would be a serious loss to society?"

"What plan would you adopt," asked John, who was amused at the warmth which Mr. Grenfell displayed, "supposing you had the management of convicts?"

"I would feed them badly, and work them

hard," he replied. "I would make their lives a burden to them, so that when they were released they would not be anxious to return. Further, I would make them perform a certain quantity of work every day—enough to pay for their food."

"They would in all probability never perform the full quantity of work you set them."

"They might do as they pleased about that," he answered, with a laugh. "I would say to them, 'Here is a certain quantity of work for you to do; when it is done you shall have another meal, and no sooner.' If they did not choose to do it, they might starve, and welcome."

"That would certainly be a good plan," replied John; "but I am afraid that when our friend Robson is placed there he will find it a more desirable situation. Randall Smith is in trouble, is he not?"

"Yes; he was secretary to a lead mine company with a hard Welsh name," said Mr. Grenfell, "and he worked the thing exceedingly well for a time, so far as the shares were concerned. They were all taken up, and several calls were made, but, at the end of

three months, an inquiry was instituted into the affairs of the company, and it turned out to be a mere paper mine, which never existed. There was an old shaft, I believe, but not an ounce of lead was ever found there, and there were no workmen."

"Randall was arrested, I believe?" observed John, who had heard a very exaggerated account of the whole matter.

"No, the bird had flown before the news reached Liverpool, and he has made good his escape to some refuge or other with his booty."

"Where is Mrs. Smith?" asked John, who naturally felt anxious to know the fate of these people.

"I really cannot say," replied Mr. Grenfell; "there is a warrant out for her husband's apprehension, but I do not suppose he will be ever caught."

"Robson has lost a useful auxiliary," remarked John, thoughtfully. "The man could not do much unassisted, but he was useful in carrying out other people's schemes."

"Is Mr. Hamilton aware of this last new conspiracy of Robson's to which you referred?"

asked Mr. Grenfell; "it does not seem right to keep him in the dark."

"He knows nothing about it yet," replied John, "or, at least, he only suspects it. To make him fully acquainted with it, would only precipitate matters, and defeat our counter-measures."

"I have no faith in plotting of any kind," replied Mr. Grenfell, seriously, "whether it be for good or for evil. It generally fails, and I would advise you to keep clear of it."

"We are not plotting in the usual sense of the term," replied John; "we are merely taking steps to counteract this man's villainous schemes. I have no doubt we shall succeed."

He returned to his lodgings soon afterwards, and spent the rest of the evening in unpacking his luggage and arranging his rooms. He was very tired when this was done, and retired to rest, determining to seek Isabel Greenwood again the next day.

His views on the subject were changed since his visit to America. He flattered himself that he knew more of the world, and had

more experience of men and their ways ; and he told himself over and over again, until he almost believed it, that it was his duty to marry Louisa Hamilton if possible, and thus to secure for himself an honourable position and place in the world. He dreaded poverty with a morbid fear that was growing daily upon him ; and he loved money, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the luxuries, pleasures, and honours it could procure. This being the case, he could not marry Isabel, even if she would accept him, which he doubted. He would be connecting himself for life with one who would hamper his movements and cramp his energies ; and, however beautiful she might be, he could not suffer that. He had every reason to believe that Louisa Hamilton looked favourably upon his suit ; and her wealth, combined with her father's influence, would at once open the high road of success to him.

He had determined upon this course of conduct during the passage out to Boston, and mentally he adhered to it ever since ; but when he came to reduce it to practice, there

were one or two little difficulties in the way. It was just possible, though not probable, that Mr. Hamilton might refuse his consent to the proposed arrangement; and, in that case, thought John, with curious inconsistency, there could be no objection to his offering himself to Isabel. Even if she refused him, John was unwilling completely to lose sight of this girl, who had so strongly fascinated him. He believed that he would always feel a warm interest in her, and he did not wish to completely forget her. These two considerations were strong enough to induce him to seek another interview with her.

He went at the old time—the time he thought she would be leaving business—and to the old place. He recognized so well the once familiar spot, and his heart warmed in spite of all his cold, worldly theories, as he saw her coming forth attired in the same dress as he had seen her in four months ago. She walked slowly and meditatively along the pavement, without crossing the street, so that he was compelled to go over to the other side, and accost her.

"Miss Greenwood," he said, in a voice that was a little tender, notwithstanding his efforts to control and steady it, "am I quite forgotten?"

"By no means, Mr. Raymond," she said, with a pleased smile of welcome, and, at the same time, extending her hand to him. "I am glad to find you back again after so long an absence—longer than you expected, I believe."

"Much longer," he replied, walking by her side. "I thought my stay would not extend to more than two months at the furthest, but I have been away four months."

"Only four months!" she said. "It seemed a year."

The observation was one that did not refer in any way to John, but he flattered himself that she had missed him, and that his absence seemed, therefore, doubly long to her. It was not so. The trouble and anxiety that she had encountered had made the time appear long—not any tender feeling for John. He deceived himself, but the self-deception made him happy.

"The business which took me to the United States occupied much more time than I ex-

pected," John observed, not knowing exactly how to continue the conversation; "but I returned at last before I had barely finished it."

"That was wrong," she said gravely. "You ought to have finished it completely instead of hurrying away. I do not approve of your conduct in this."

"I see you have not forgotten your old habits," he said, smilingly. "But it is hardly fair to lecture me on the very first occasion after my return. It is rather hard upon me, is it not?"

"I do not think so," she replied, smiling, also; "the sooner you hear it the better. It will have more effect upon you. Were you successful in your business?"

"Yes, very," replied John. "I believe that all parties concerned will make a large amount of money by it."

"Still striving for money," she said, gently. "I hoped that there would be less of that spirit, and more of the self-denying spirit of Christianity visible in you when you returned."

He could not endure this gentle reproach, although he was perfectly well aware that she

was right in her estimate of his aims and ambition. He felt that this girl understood his secret thoughts, and the workings of his heart, and this is not a pleasant feeling to have unless the bonds of love are strong, and indissoluble between them. For a person not bound in any way to you to master the inner thoughts and feelings of one's mind is by no means pleasant nor agreeable. John felt this, and, therefore, he tried to convince her that she was wrong in her opinion.

"It is true I have been striving to make money," he said. "It was my duty to do so as much as it is a clergyman's duty to preach. The greater part of the profits will, of course, belong to my employer, who sent me out, but a portion belongs to me. I cannot, however, be fairly accused of mercenary motives. I could not, of course, refuse to go out when I was sent. It was my duty to go."

"I can quite understand that," she replied; "but it seems to me that you exult too much in this profit, and set too much heed upon it. The things that lead me to think so are, of course, very slight, but many things

which people usually consider trifles are important indications of man's thoughts and wishes. I think you are more mercenary than ever."

She was looking full into his face with her clear, honest eyes, and that scrutinizing gaze made him to blush to the roots of his hair. Mercenary! Of course he was.

He knew it perfectly well, and could not deny it. Was he not madly in love with this girl, and yet he had all but proposed to the rich merchant's daughter.

"I am afraid you are right," he said, humbly. "I am more worldly now than before I left England. Mixing with the world makes one to love it."

"Not always," she answered. "Some people who have mixed much more with the world than either you or I have hated and despised it the more they saw of it. It is the tinsel and gaudy show of the world that attracts you now. You will soon tire of it."

Her voice was gentle and soft—her smile so winning—that he almost renounced his schemes of self-aggrandizement.

"I do not know," he said, "how you can continue in this peaceful, contented frame of mind, surrounded as you are, to some extent, by temptations to worldliness. I almost lose my good resolutions when I leave you."

"It is a proof that you are not convinced that they are *good resolutions*," she replied, with a smile. "Perhaps also you do your best to forget them. For instance, I believe that there are thousands of noble churches of all denominations in America. May I ask how often, during your four months, or, at the least, three months' stay there, did you attend services at any of them?"

This question was an awkward one for John. He had visited a large number of churches as a matter of curiosity, but not during the hours of divine service. He had only been in three or four services, and he told her so frankly and honestly.

"I am very sorry," she said, and her voice expressed her sorrow. "We cannot expect to live good and useful lives if we make no effort whatever to do so."

They were near her residence, and she did

not wish him to know the exact place, so she bade him farewell. He returned, slowly and thoughtfully, to his lodgings, feeling more and more miserable, and wavering—longing to win this girl, who thought so earnestly, and spoke so fearlessly, and yet unwilling to part with the wealth and position which Louisa Hamilton could give him. He despised and hated himself for this weak, foolish conduct, but he could not still the wild storm of conflicting love and ambition which raged within him. With all his advantages, John Raymond felt himself to be a weak, miserable man.

CHAPTER X.

TROUBLED WATERS.

EDWARD GREENWOOD had departed from town, in order to superintend personally the work upon which he had been for some time previously occupied, and as the excitement produced by the collapse of the Mynydd Mawr Lead Company (Limited), had, in a great measure, died away, he did not fear unpleasant consequences, especially as the estate to which he was proceeding was in a remote district where he was quite unknown.

The evening before he left he appeared to be in unusually low spirits. He sat in silence, gazing moodily into the fire, whilst Isabel was steadily engaged upon some embroidery. She was not much inclined for conversation, for she had a foreboding that her brother's approaching departure was fraught with evil consequences to them all in some way or other. She dreaded, lest, being alone, he might again give way to

his favourite vice, or be again tempted to throw away his opportunities, as he had previously cast them away. Her brother's unusual silence drew her attention, however, at last.

"What are you thinking about, Edward," she asked, glancing up from her work. "You appear to be as gloomy as if you were leaving us for ever."

"I was not thinking of my departure at all," he replied. "I believe that will do me good. I was thinking that it would be by far the best plan to confront these lead mine shareholders, and have done with it."

"They would have you arrested to a certainty," she answered, in a surprised tone of voice. "Do you wish to come before a criminal court in St. George's Hall soon?"

"I do not think they would have me arrested," he replied, quietly. "On the contrary, I believe, that if I came before them, and explained how the matter really happened, they would let me off."

"How did it occur?" asked Isabel, feeling sure that some unrevealed portion of the transaction was weighing heavily upon his

mind. "What *could* you say in self-defence to a number of men deeply exasperated by their losses?"

"I never went down to the mine at all," he said, gazing still into the fire in the same gloomy, melancholy manner. "That wretched report was published without my ever seeing the mine—at all events, after this company undertook its management."

"But do you not see that this confession would only irritate them the more," Isabel said, in a tone of disappointment. "If you have nothing else to say, you had better never go near them."

"But I have something to say more to the point than this," he replied, in a slightly irritated voice. "I never wrote that report—I merely signed it."

"Who wrote it, then?" she asked, hurriedly, with a faint flush upon her cheeks.

"Mr.—Robson," he replied, slowly; "and the secretary, Randall Smith, was, of course, there. But I had no hand in its production."

"Still that would not exculpate you," she said, shaking her head slowly. "They would

say, with justice, that you had been grossly negligent, and dishonest, in signing a report of a mine you had not seen for years, and that report drawn up by people who knew nothing about it."

"There is another point to be mentioned still," he observed, quietly. "I was not even aware of the contents of the paper. I was not aware when I entered that such a paper had been drawn up. I was not aware until three days afterwards that I had signed it."

"How did they manage all this?" she asked, with a keen suspicion, however, as to the mode in which it had been effected.

"I was dead drunk," he replied, in a low voice, "and Robson made me so."

Brother and sister were silent for a few moments—he speculating as to whether this confession would mitigate his guilt, she reflecting upon the terrible position her brother's infatuation had led him into.

"Would that justify me?" he asked, rather eagerly.

"Nothing can justify you," she replied;

but, observing the disappointment depicted upon his features, she added, "it might, however, induce them to be a little more lenient to you. It would certainly be the best course under the circumstances to meet them courageously."

"I think so, too," he replied; "it would be better than living in this miserable uncertainty."

She would have rejoiced to see him adopt this course, which he himself proposed, but when she pressed him to do so, his courage failed him. It was easy to talk about acting honourably, and with manly straightforwardness, but it was not so easy to carry out his good resolutions.

"There is plenty of time, Isabel," he said; "when I return, I can do it. Why should I be in a hurry to draw trouble upon myself?"

"You are trying, or, at least, you would be trying, to clear yourself, and to wipe away the stain upon your character," she replied; "that would not be drawing trouble upon yourself, but the reverse. You ought not to lose a moment in a case like this. What if

you should be arrested in the meantime—your defence will be half spoilt.”

“I cannot do it before my return,” he replied, peevishly. “I must go away to-morrow ; and it would not do to write.”

“If you wrote to the chairman or some other leading man among the shareholders, telling him frankly the true state of the case, it would be easier to meet them afterwards,” she urged. “Tell them that you cannot meet them at present, but you will do so when you come back to town.”

It was in vain to urge and entreat him. He had no decision nor strength of mind, and although he had been contemplating this course for some time, he could not make up his mind to take any step in the right direction. He found it much easier to think virtuously and honestly than to act so.

He went away on the following morning, and Isabel was sorry to see him depart. She had as yet but little faith in his good resolutions and promises of amendment, for the conversation of the previous evening showed clearly enough that he was but little changed.

The more she reflected upon his confession, the more doubtful she became as to its truth. If he had really been deceived and befooled into signing a report when in an unfit state to judge for himself, why should he hesitate to avow it? But if, on the other hand, he was a more active participator in the swindle, he had just cause to dread exposure.

Mrs. Greenwood was still in the same failing state of health, and becoming feebler every day. Sometimes she had to be carried from her bed-room to the sitting-room, and she sat for hours together, with a vacant stare upon her countenance, feebly muttering to herself. At other times, she appeared as intelligent and clear-minded as ever, and conversed with perfect ease and understanding; but Isabel and all around her saw but too clearly that the beginning of the end was come.

One evening Isabel was preparing supper, and her mother appeared to be much better than usual, so much so that the evening meal was later than usual. The tea-things were laid upon the table, the bread was cut and duly buttered, and then Isabel began to

toast some cheese, a delicacy for which her mother had a special liking.

She was upon her knees on the hearthrug busily occupied, when she heard the door open and a heavy tread upon the floor behind her. She started up, and turned round to see a face which she knew too well—a face that haunted her sleeping hours like a hideous nightmare—a face that she hated as much as her pure, forgiving spirit could hate—her father's.

Her mother did not speak a word. Her eyes were fixed upon his face with a fascinated expression, as if it were impossible to withdraw them, although he only bestowed one brief contemptuous glance upon her. His attention was fixed upon his daughter—this bright, beautiful creature whom he had driven from his house, and whom he was about so cruelly to mortify. He chuckled as he thought of the victory that was to be his—a victory over a helpless girl, and an almost imbecile invalid!

He stood in the centre of the room facing his astonished but fearless daughter. There seemed to be some deep instinct of opposition between these two natures, which completely

obliterated paternal and filial feelings. He triumphed in the fact that he had discovered their retreat, and was about to remove his wife away from the daughter. She longed to be free from the grasp of this man, who had always opposed and grieved her. Sometimes she hated herself for this unnatural feeling, but do what she might she could not overcome it.

"I have found you at last, my pretty birds?" he said, in slow, taunting accents. "My amiable daughter and my affectionate wife have been hidden so long from me that it is quite refreshing to find them once more."

He spoke in a half-reflective, half-mocking manner, as if there were invisible occupants in the room whom he was taking into his confidence.

"My home has been desolate so long," he continued, tauntingly, "and I have grieved for the wanderers, expecting to see them return, but the days went by with leaden wings, and my eyes were not gladdened by their presence."

Isabel endeavoured to control herself for her mother's sake as long as possible, but she could restrain her indignation no longer.

"What do you want here?" she cried, turning fiercely upon him; "do you know that if you had a right to ill-treat me in your own house you have none here, and that I can have you removed whenever I choose?"

"What forcible language! what powerful eloquence! what vivid imagination!" he cried in the same smiling, taunting manner. "She is an adept in the art—quite a female Demosthenes on a small scale!"

Isabel's anger broke all bounds. She could endure anything rather than these hateful taunts and sneers.

"Answer me," she cried, confronting him boldly, so that he instinctively stepped back, "what do you want here? Why do you intrude your presence upon us?"

"What should the lone, desolate man seek but the wife of his bosom?" he replied, as calmly as before—"the wife whom he loved and lost."

His coolness and self-possession gave him an advantage over her. She perceived this, and struggled to regain her usual firmness and presence of mind.

"If you mean that you are going to re-

move my mother from here, you will have to do it by force," she said, more quietly; "the physician who attends her will certify that her removal will be fatal to her; and, if this is the case, let the consequences be upon your head."

"In sickness and weariness let the wanderer return to her husband's home," he continued; "there alone is rest to be found."

"The rest she will find there will be the rest of the grave in a very short time," cried Isabel, who was becoming angry again. "You could not adopt a surer way to kill her."

The last words caught the ears of the sick woman.

"Oh, no—do not let him kill me!" she exclaimed wildly, and making an effort to rise from her chair. "If he takes me away he will kill me! I want to stay here. I will not go away."

"Do you hear that?" exclaimed Isabel. "She does not wish to go with you, for she knows perfectly well what would be the result. You drove her from your house by your brutality and ill-treatment; why not let her remain here?"

"Because I do not choose to do so," he replied, suddenly changing his manner of speaking, but still preserving his sneering tone of voice; "because the law allows me to do what I like with my own wife—to beat, ill-use, persecute her, and even murder her in a certain way. I am only exercising my privilege, and I claim my wife."

"She shall not go," cried Isabel, with horror, at the same time ringing the bell; and when the landlady appeared, she desired her to fetch the kind-hearted physician who had attended upon her.

"She shall go!" he replied, emphatically; "and you may as well bid her good-bye before she goes, for I mean to take care that you shall never see her again."

The poor woman heard these brutal words, and with a low moan of anguish she fainted away.

The physician arrived in a few minutes; and before she revived, Isabel acquainted him with the facts of the case.

"I positively refuse to allow her to be removed," he said, emphatically; "in my

opinion, it will cause her death. She is not in a fit state to be removed, and I will not be answerable for the consequences."

"I will," replied the intruder, calmly. "She must be removed, and if she dies, which I am afraid she will not, I will be answerable for anything that may be brought against me."

The physician made a gesture of disgust, and turned his attention to the unfortunate woman, who was returning to a sense of her frightful position.

"Do not let him take me away," she moaned, piteously, "he will kill me if he does. I see it in his face—he will kill me—he will kill me!"

Isabel and the physician endeavoured in vain to soothe her—she still continued her piteous cries. Her husband stood with folded arms and with a sneering smile still upon his countenance, but there was an ominous scowl lurking in his eyes that boded no good to the unfortunate woman when once she was completely in his clutches.

A cab was ordered, and, in spite of all Isabel

and the physician's remonstrances, Mrs. Greenwood was placed inside and driven away.

"Take your last look of her, my affectionate daughter," said her father, with a fiendish smile, as he placed his almost unconscious wife in the vehicle, "she will no longer be a burden upon you—I will prevent that."

And with these last words, almost hissed into her ears, Isabel stood upon the doorstep listening with straining ears to the carriage-wheels, which rattled loudly over the pavements of the silent streets.

Isabel Greenwood stood in her sitting-room alone again. Mother and brother were gone, and that sweet home-life which had comforted and cheered her was at an end. Her mother, she knew, she should never see again—her father's watch would be too vigilant and unremitting to allow an interview, and as for her brother she was filled with misgivings. Never had she been so utterly hopeless as upon that night, when her dreams of happiness were so rudely shattered. Some in her position would have entreated the mercy and forbearance of

the man who so ruthlessly trampled her under foot, but she knew by bitter experience that such a course would have afforded him the keenest delight, without, in any way, changing his resolution. She could not, therefore, humble herself before him, knowing but too well that it would avail her nothing. Her mother was gone for ever, and the certainty that they should meet no more wrung the girl's heart.

In her trouble she thought of John with a softer feeling than she had ever experienced before. It was sweet to have some one to love when her life was so loveless, and though she did not love him as yet, there was a feeling of unusual tenderness towards him in her heart. She believed that she had some influence over him, and that the better side of his nature could be readily developed, and in this belief she hoped eventually to influence him materially in the right direction. He was by all accounts a very estimable young man, and he loved her—had he not said so, if not in actual words yet by his manner and expression? This was undoubtedly his chief merit

in her eyes, and at that desolate hour she was glad that anyone regarded her with affection.

He was waiting for her the next evening, and proposed a walk by the river side. She had determined to take him into her confidence, and to tell him the precise circumstances in which she was placed. He might be able to assist her, but, in any case, her burden would be lightened by sharing it with another.

"You appear unusually sad to-night," he said, as they watched the stream of passengers to and from the river steamers. She was trying to muster up courage to begin her story when he spoke, and she was glad of the opportunity thus presented to her.

"I feel sad and depressed to-night," she replied. "I have had trouble and sorrow at home since I saw you last."

And then the whole story was told—how her father had abused and ill-treated her mother and herself, and had added to his previous long list of gross offences by this crowning act of outrage. Her brother's history was also dwelt upon, and she explained the manner in which he asserted that his

signature to the report was obtained. She did not stop until she had related all her troubles and trials, from beginning to end, and she was grateful to her companion for the deep interest he displayed in the recital.

"What am I to do?" she asked, in conclusion. "I cannot claim my mother, and I am sure that if she remains in this man's custody she will not live many weeks. And my brother also!—Is it not possible to clear him in some way?"

"I believe it will be easier to restore your brother to you with an unsullied name, so far as it can be unsullied after his recent conduct, than to recover your mother from her captor," he answered, gravely. "I heard a piece of news yesterday that would have materially influenced his decision if he had been aware of it."

She felt that he had some good tidings to communicate, but she dared not ask him their nature lest she should be disappointed. He continued, however, without noticing her silence.

"It appears," he pursued, "that the people

engaged in investigating the papers and affairs of the company discovered a rough draft of the report, drawn up in Randall Smith's handwriting. He, as you know, was the secretary, and it was evident, from the document, that someone had supplied him with data to work upon. Fortunately for your brother, this paper was dated, and it was written on the day when he was supposed to be in South Wales surveying the mine. This confirms your brother's account, and shows pretty clearly, I think, that Smith, aided by some one else, whom I can only guess at, really drew up the document."

"I am so glad," she murmured, in a tremulous voice. "If my brother only knew this also! It establishes his innocence without any further explanation."

"By no means," he replied; "at present the shareholders cannot satisfactorily account for this paper. I do not know what supposition they have made to explain it; but it occurs to me that they will conclude the report to have been drawn up by the secretary, but copied and signed in the usual manner by the engineer. It would never suggest itself to them that he

was tricked and duped by them and compelled to sign it—I should never think of such a thing myself, and it is not very probable that they will.”

“You are right,” she said; “he must come forward in person to inform them of the share he actually had in the business: I see that nothing else will suffice.”

“There ought to be no difficulty in his way,” he answered, thoughtfully; “they will believe him, for, from what I know of the shareholders, they have shown remarkable forbearance throughout the affair. It would materially improve your brother’s prospects if he decided upon a manly course like this.”

“He is so vacillating,” she said, doubtfully; “and his habits of life have made him nervous and miserable, even when there is no real cause for it. I shall endeavour to persuade him to take this course, and I hope to succeed.”

“It appears to me,” replied John, “that he ought to be very thankful for such an opportunity of getting out of what looked like a very awkward scrape. It will do him good, I hope. The promoters of this company were the

greatest scoundrels in existence, and could only injure your brother. He ought to be glad that the connection is broken."

"I believe he is very glad and thankful," she replied; "but my chief difficulty is with regard to my mother's position. What can I do to help her?"

"I am afraid you can do nothing," he said, gravely; "your father has an undoubted legal right to be her guardian, and he appears to be determined to exercise it."

"That is quite true," she replied; "but can I not demand admission into my own home to see my dying mother?"

John's legal knowledge upon this point was rather limited, but he feared that she could not demand an entrance, and he told her so, adding, that even if she had a legal right, her father would find means of baffling her.

"Yes; he would remove her from town," she replied, sadly. "I am afraid it is impossible to conquer him. I must submit to my fate, and never see her again. But it is hard to do it."

She was weeping softly as she spoke, and

John's heart yearned with a strong impulse to take her in his arms and comfort her.

"Do not weep," he said, gently, "you can do no good by grieving for her."

"I cannot help it," she said, piteously, "our home was so bright before he came, and now I am quite alone in the world."

He could resist the impulse no longer—he clasped her round the waist and whispered: "Not quite alone, Isabel, dear. Let me take care of you. I will love you better than mother or brother, only do not reject my love."

She could not reject it when it was so precious to her. She loved him then, though she never had done so before, for he had comforted her in her moment of utmost need, and gladdened her desolate heart. She could not reject it, for it filled the aching void in her breast. She could not speak. Mingled sorrow and gladness choked her utterance; but her head drooped upon his shoulder, and his arm was still supporting her. He had his answer, and it was enough for him.

"Let us go away from here, Isabel, dear," he said, rising, "this is too public a place for

my new found happiness. I can scarcely believe it yet."

It was indeed difficult to realize the fact that he was Isabel Greenwood's betrothed lover, and that for the future Louisa Hamilton must be nothing to him. Great joy and gladness filled his soul as he gazed upon the fair girl by his side, and he could have sacrificed more than the merchant's daughter, if it were necessary, in order to gain Isabel's love. Such were his feelings in the first sweet surprise and ardour of a newly-accepted lover.

They walked homeward almost in silence. Both were too happy and too occupied with their own thoughts to speak much. She did not object now to his escorting her to the door of her residence—he had a right to do so, and she was not disposed to dispute his claim. They parted with a final kiss, an injunction to Isabel to be punctual if possible on the following evening, and John was gone. He remained up that night smoking innumerable pipes of tobacco, and congratulating himself audibly on being a very lucky fellow. Notwithstanding his felicitations, however, there

was a secret feeling in his heart which might become stronger before long, that in proposing to Isabel Greenwood, he had done a very foolish thing.

And Isabel? She also remained in her room meditating with a soft smile upon her countenance over the events of the day. The world appeared so black that morning, but everything assumed a roseate hue to her eyes that evening beneath the magic wand of the enchanter Love.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. HAMILTON TAKES ADVICE.

MR. AND MRS. HAMILTON had given John a general invitation to come up to The Elms whenever he thought proper, but he did not often avail himself of it. He wished to avoid Louisa's company as much as possible, lest the temptation which had once been so powerful might assail him again, and he therefore thought it best for her and himself that he should not go often to the house.

It was, however, necessary to appear sometimes at the merchant's hospitable table. Not to do so would cause inquiry, which he did not wish to court, for although his engagement was a source of unfeigned delight to him, he could not bring himself to announce it at The Elms nor to the merchant himself. He had an idea that it would not be welcome intelligence, and he quieted his conscience with the reflection that it was no concern of Mr. Hamilton's, and

therefore that it was not his duty to tell him of it. It was the first important secret which he had kept from Mr. Grenfell also, and he was more uneasy on this account than upon that of the others.

Isabel was unable to meet him one evening, being detained in the shop until an unusually late hour. She sent him a dainty little note, the first he had ever received from her, informing him of the circumstance and telling him not to endeavour to meet her that night. This note reached him at the office, and was handed to him by Mr. Grimson, who glanced curiously at the handwriting.

"Here is a note for you, Mr. Raymond," he said, displaying his white polished teeth, "I was not aware that you had fair correspondents."

"How do you know who my correspondent may be?" asked John, sharply and even rudely.

"I only drew an inference from the handwriting and envelope," he replied, with a deprecatory smile as if the whole question was one that he considered beneath his dignity to converse about.

John took the envelope in silence and went to his own desk where he opened it. He was disappointed to find that their usual meeting was not to take place that evening, but it struck him that he might make use of the time to call upon the ladies at The Elms, especially as Mr. Hamilton was going out of town.

He went up to the merchant's room, and entered after a preliminary tap at the door.

"I intend availing myself to-night of your kind invitation," he said, "and as you are not to be at home I may relieve, in some degree, the monotony of the evening."

"They will be glad to see you, Raymond," remarked the merchant, kindly. "Louisa was saying only yesterday that your visits are very rare now."

John's conscience smote him, for he guessed the reason why Miss Hamilton was so anxious to see him, and he felt he was, to a certain extent, responsible for it. He dreaded lest his coming visit might involve him in fresh difficulties ; but he could not avoid paying it.

The leaves were beginning to fall in the

avenue leading up to the mansion, and nature was again putting on a wintry appearance. The house seemed sombre and gloomy in the twilight as John approached it, and the flowers in the gardens had nearly all faded away. In the house, things were much the same as usual. Mrs. Hamilton's health was apparently restored, and excepting a deeper shade of melancholy in her dark eyes, she was the same lovely and haughty beauty who had won the rich merchant's heart years before. Louisa's days were spent in wondering why John never visited the house, and she questioned her father as to the cause as closely as she could without exciting his suspicions. Not that she really believed him to be ignorant of the state of things, but it pleased her to invest it with an air of romance which did not belong to it. For this reason she would be pleased if her father refused his consent in case John proposed (as she fully expected him to do), for nothing would delight her more than a midnight elopement and the traditional glories of love in a cottage. Her romantic disposition, however, was of the mildest kind. She loved

to contemplate, mentally, scenes where she might be the heroine, and John the hero ; and often spent a whole afternoon in the gardens of The Elms, holding imaginary conversations of a highly melodramatic description ; but if closely examined and tested, it would be found that Louisa Hamilton had a very solid regard for the comforts and luxuries of life, and was not prepared to sacrifice one of them for the sake of romance—and no doubt she was right ; but then it was foolish to waste her time in vain dreams and romantic aspirations.

It was by the aid of her sentimental notions respecting what love ought to be, even in this practical matter-of-fact nineteenth century, that she accounted for John's defection. That he loved her deeply and passionately, the little maiden never doubted ; for it would have spoiled her dreams of future bliss, in all of which he was interwoven, if she had done so. He had almost said as much, and he had very clearly given her to understand his deep interest in her. A want of affection for her could not therefore be his reason for holding aloof. No doubt he felt the great difference in their

social positions, and dreaded a charge of mere mercenary ambition if he proposed to the rich merchant's daughter. His finely balanced nature and highly sensitive feelings would not permit him to lay himself open even to be suspected of such designs, and consequently he withdrew from their society as much as possible.

He would no doubt come forward at the proper moment, when he saw a reasonable chance of securing Mr. Hamilton's consent, and would declare himself, but until then she was afraid he would be as much a stranger to her as he now wished to be. John's visit upon this particular evening was therefore an agreeable and pleasurable surprise. It is true that her theory was rather damaged by it. If he intended to discontinue his visits, why should he now appear just as if nothing at all had happened beyond the mere press of business, which he alleged as an excuse for his apparent neglect? Then, again, she fondly imagined that the state of mind which she believed him to be in would render him dejected and melancholy; but he was in his usual spirits,

and did not seem to be suffering from disappointed affection at all! It was rather a perplexing problem, and Louisa's little head was not strong enough to solve it.

John received a warm welcome. Mrs. Hamilton reproved him gently for his long absence from the house, and Louisa strove to appear at ease and to meet him as if nothing whatever had happened and they were only friendly acquaintances. She did not succeed very well, but John was grateful to her for the attempt, and treated her with the politeness due to his employer's only daughter. He mentally compared her soft girlish beauty and her pretty stream of very small talk with the fascinating grace and tenderness of Isabel Greenwood. The difference was a striking one, but even at the moment when he felt this the most strongly there was another comparison drawn in his mind. He could not help the conviction nor shut his eyes to the fact, that as the husband of the merchant's daughter he would at once be placed in a position which he would have to toil and struggle for years to obtain, and possibly never

reach at all when connected with a girl who might give him a wealth of love and beauty, but could give him nothing that would add to his influence in the world. Isabel would probably persuade him that the influence which he coveted was not worth obtaining, but in his present state of mind he could not adopt that view. He loved the pleasures and honours of the world, and it remained to be seen whether he loved them more than he did Isabel Greenwood.

The curtains were drawn, lights brought in, and the three sat down for what John expected to be a pleasant, homely conversation ; but before long Louisa went out of the room to perform some duties which she had omitted during the day, and John was left alone with Mrs. Hamilton. She was seated in a cosy arm-chair, which was pushed back so that the light did not fall fully upon her, and her face was entirely in the shade. She was silent for a few moments trying to decide upon the best way of introducing the subject upon which she wished to speak.

“I have long wished for an opportunity to

“speak to you alone, Mr. Raymond,” she said at last, feeling unable to approach it gradually, and determining to plunge at once into the midst of it. “I am in some trouble and difficulty, and I wish to ask for your advice as well as assistance.”

“I need not tell you that I shall be most happy to serve you in any way,” he replied, believing that she had some trifling negotiation in which she required help. He did not imagine that Mrs. Hamilton was in serious trouble, for if she were her husband would be the proper person to apply to, he thought.

“I have been annoyed and even persecuted,” she went on rapidly, as if she feared to break down before the disclosure was made, “and harassed incessantly by my husband’s manager, Mr. Grimson.”

She stopped suddenly as if uncertain what to say next.

“By Mr. Grimson?” repeated John, gravely, but without even a trace of surprise in his voice.

“Yes,” she replied, determined to confide fully in him; “I knew this man in my earlier

days, when I was poor and unhappy, the daughter of a small struggling tradesman, and as he contrived to become very intimate with my father he knew all about me. There were one or two things which I did not wish to be known after my marriage with Mr. Hamilton, and the other day this man came to me and threatened that unless I submitted to the conditions he wished to impose he would tell Mr. Hamilton the whole story."

"How would that affect you?" asked John, quietly, knowing of course that this depended entirely upon the nature of the charges which would be brought against her.

"I scarcely know," she replied, leaning forward. "I pledge you my word that he could say nothing against me which amounts to more than mere girlish folly; but I do not know how these statements would influence Mr. Hamilton. With all his good nature and love for me, he is very proud, especially where he conceives that his honour is concerned."

"What were the conditions he imposed?"

"I dare not name them," she replied, with a deep, burning blush, that was visible even

through the shade which surrounded her ;
“ they were such as no wife ought to listen to,
and I would a thousand times prefer my husband’s wrath than the dishonour he wished to tempt me into.”

She was becoming excited, and her hands toyed nervously with her watch-chain.

“ I am surprised to hear that,” he said, quietly. “ He is a married man.”

“ A married man !” she exclaimed, in unbounded astonishment. “ I knew him to be a great scoundrel, but I had no idea of such monstrous villany as this. Are you sure ?”

“ Quite sure,” he replied, in the same tone ; “ he told me so himself.”

“ It was a strange departure from his usual cunning,” she went on again ; “ but it shows how utterly reckless he is. He will hesitate at nothing in order to gain his ends. He managed to obtain a hold upon my father—or upon the man who calls himself my father—by lending him money, and then he turned round upon him suddenly, telling him that unless the money was immediately forthcoming he would have him arrested. He knew that this man

would apply to me, and perhaps he reckoned upon my dutiful regard and affection for a parent who absolutely sold me at the altar, and thought that I would be more pliant and tractable."

She laughed bitterly and scornfully in her haughty contempt for so clumsy a schemer. Even if the miserable, stunted retailer of herrings and odds and ends, in a street off Scotland Road, had been a thousand times her father, she would have allowed him to go into the deepest and darkest dungeon that the myrmidons of the law ever devised, rather than give way before this man, whom she hated with a force and intensity that appalled even herself in her softer moments. It was well for him that the unpleasant practice of roasting refractory characters, in which our forefathers so frequently indulged, was at an end—she would have liked to expose this man to a good brisk fire for half an hour.

"You said that your father—if such he be—sold you at the altar," he said, in much the same tone an unfledged curate would use in putting his class through a vigorous examina-

tion in the Catechism ; " was not your marriage one of free choice and inclination ?"

" Yes," she replied, slowly, for she had not yet brought herself to the point where she could confess the bitter repentance that filled her heart for that great mistake of her life ; " it was, in a great measure, my own choice. Mr. Hamilton was very kind and very rich, and I was very poor. He proposed and I accepted him—so far the affair was entirely my own doing ; but I discovered afterwards that this man wheedled a large sum of money from Mr. Hamilton before he would give his consent, and afterwards actually proposed to compel me if I proved obstinate, as he called it ; a proposal, which I must do my husband the justice to say he indignantly rejected."

" I can quite believe that," put in John.

" I have found out since then how great a mistake I committed," she continued, without noticing the interruption, " I was not loyal to my husband, inasmuch as I could not love him as he loved me, and the wealth that seemed so tempting at a distance lost its charm when I found it in my grasp. The

maddest, wickedest action man or woman can ever commit is to marry for money's sake alone."

John winced as he listened to the passionate words of the woman who felt the bitter degradation which her mercenary conduct entailed upon her. It would have been well for him if he had followed her advice; but mankind are more prone to neglect good than bad counsels. In the littleness of his soul, man imagines himself able to guide his own footsteps, and to escape the humiliation others have endured, whilst he enjoys the pleasures they coveted. We are rarely willing to accept the fruit of experience gained by others.

"You said that you required my advice and assistance," he said, wishing to draw her attention away from this subject, which was unpleasant to both of them; "how can I help you in this matter?"

"I think you can do a great deal, if you wish," was the eager reply; "this man must be in his present position by means of false pretences of some kind. I wish to discover the means through which he obtained the appoint-

ment, and if it can be proved to Mr. Hamilton's satisfaction, that he has been deceived, he will dismiss this man, who must have some object in view in staying with him. It may be a desire to improve his worldly position, but I much fear that he has some other motive. I hope the miserable business in which his brother was once involved, will not be repeated."

"I am decidedly of opinion that Mr. Grimson has an unlawful object in view," remarked John, with the air of a man who had fully considered the question, and decided upon it; "but I am quite at a loss to know what possible benefit his dismissal, if it could be effected, would be to you. He would certainly tell your husband the whole story out of pure malice and rage."

"That is true," she replied, as if this view had never presented itself to her before; "but Mr. Hamilton would not be likely to put credence upon the spiteful words of a detected impostor," she continued, more hopefully clinging to this slender thread with eagerness.

"That depends entirely upon the proof he

could adduce of his statements," observed John, trying to note the effect his words produced, but he failed to see her face, which was averted from him; "he would certainly place no reliance upon this man's unsupported word, but he might be able to substantiate his charges, if I can call them so without offence. I am in the dark upon the whole case, but you ought to be able to determine whether he could prove his assertions."

She was unable to say how far he could do this. She dreaded to put it to the test, for she knew that if proof was to be procured he would produce it. In any case she saw that his dismissal would avail her nothing.

"I do not know whether he can prove it or not," she murmured, despairingly; "but his dismissal would only enrage him. What can I do? Is there no way of defeating him?"

"Only one way, I think, my dear madam," he said, soothingly, "and this is the course you ought to have pursued long ago. Tell your husband the whole story; he will love you better than ever, and you will extricate

yourself from your unpleasant position at once."

"I cannot—I dare not," she said, in a voice tremulous with emotion. "I cannot face him with such an avowal. He would never speak a kind word to me again—all his love would be turned into contempt."

"That depends upon the nature of the avowal," observed John, quietly.

"No, it does not," she replied; "the avowal in itself is simple enough, but he could never respect me after having kept this secret from him for years. He would think me a weak, wavering woman, and would never trust me again."

"That may or may not be the case," replied John, who was pacing up and down the room in great agitation; "but it is your duty to tell your husband the whole story."

"I cannot," she moaned, covering her face with her hands.

"Will you entrust the secret to me to tell him, then?" asked John, anxiously; "it would be far better that I should lay the matter before him than Mr. Grimson, and I

could then expose the manager's conduct effectually."

"I cannot tell it to you," she replied, more calmly. "I could not allow you to make it known to my husband, and therefore it would be useless on my part to burden you with it."

John was becoming very impatient and rather angry. This secret which she was so distressed about must, he thought, be something worse than she was willing to admit, or why preserve such precautions respecting it. He was also amazed that every plan he suggested was rejected by her, whilst nothing better was proposed on her part.

"I regret, then," he said, rather coldly, "that I am unable to assist you. If neither of the plans I have mentioned are agreeable to you, I am afraid that you will have to go on in the present way until you make up your mind to confide in your husband."

She saw that he was angry, and readily divined the cause. She had great confidence both in his power and willingness to serve her, and she by no means wished him to go away in anger.

"My dear Mr. Raymond," she said, softly, "you are annoyed at my weakness, but I really cannot follow the course you suggest. Do you think me wanting in due regard for you in thus rejecting your counsel. I cannot and will not speak to my husband respecting this matter if I can help it. You are not offended, are you?"

"Not exactly offended," he said, somewhat touched by her gentleness; "but I am sorry that you are determined upon a course which I think is both wrong and foolish."

He thought of what Isabel would in all probability say to this woman if she were here, and he endeavoured to lay her path of duty before her, even as she would have done.

"I think that a long course of deception like this can only end disastrously," he pursued, still pacing backwards and forwards restlessly; "whenever it comes to an end some unpleasant consequences are sure to result, but they will be infinitely more unpleasant if you allow an enemy of yours to reveal the secret. You are playing a more dangerous game than

you dream of, and the sooner it is terminated the better."

"I cannot terminate it," she said, piteously, for her pride was completely subdued before this young man, who dared to tell her of her own weakness and folly.

"You can," he replied, emphatically, "act an honest course for once, and tell your husband the whole story. He will respect your candour, at least, and however sore he may feel at first—and he must feel sore when he realises the matter—this feeling will wear away in time. He will love and respect you more than ever, and you can lead a better and more useful life than you have hitherto done."

"A more useful life?" she echoed in astonishment, and a little mystified also.

"Yes, a more useful one," he replied, in a firm emphatic way that was not lost upon his listener. "It seems to me, Mrs. Hamilton, that you have enjoyed the blessings of wealth for years, and made no use whatever of them. Instead of living for the good of others you have spent your time in pining and grieving, because of imaginary troubles, which existed

nowhere but in your own mind, and which would never have existed at all if you had been engaged in healthy, honest labour. Your life has been a very useless one, Mrs. Hamilton."

She knew that it was so, and she felt the truth of his remarks. John himself believed this to be the best course of treatment for her ; but, as he spoke, he wondered of what possible good to any one his own life had been. He felt the necessity for rousing this unhappy woman to a sense of her duty, but he also felt that his own practice was very different from the theory he advocated. He might have comforted himself with the reflection that a good many of our teachers draw a wide distinction between their theories and their practice !

"I know that," she said, in a low, sorrowful voice, "and I cannot remedy it. Troubles are thickening about me ; and, in a short time, I fear, I shall have lost the opportunities I have enjoyed—and wasted. I cannot begin now."

"You *can* begin now," was the emphatic

reply, "make your husband your confidant in this unhappy business—cost what it may. The burden will be cast off from your soul, at any rate, and then begin again."

She was silent for a long while, and John thought she was inclined to follow his counsel. But the moments sped away, and then she merely said, in that pitiful, moaning tone of voice, which betokens utter misery and helplessness.

"I wish I were dead."

"It is very wrong to utter any wish of the kind," he replied, gravely; "you have not yet began to use life properly. Will you begin now?"

She would not promise, and John saw clearly enough that it was useless to press the matter further. It was not a want of moral force, or a sufficient degree of courage that prevented her from adopting the only way which he believed would happily end her difficulties—it was the dread of a proud, haughty nature of losing that position which she had struggled and waited for for years, and which, singularly enough, in her inmost soul she did not value.

Louisa came in just at this point, and the conversation was at an end.

"You two have been having such a nice long chat," she said, curiously. "I have been looking in once or twice, and I found you so deeply engrossed that I left you to enjoy your conversation."

Mrs. Hamilton glanced upwards with a quick, suspicious expression, not unmixed with dread, doubtful whether her step-daughter had overheard any of their conversation; but that young lady's calm equanimity of manner did not indicate any knowledge of the secret conference which had just taken place, and Mrs. Hamilton rightly judged that she could not have heard anything of importance, without betraying it in some way.

John took his leave at an early hour, promising to come again soon, and returned home, meditating, anxiously, upon what he had heard. He was greatly troubled on Mr. Hamilton's account, as well as that of his wife, and wherever he turned his mental gaze there was nothing but sorrow and difficulty to be seen.

“Plots seem to be thickening everywhere,” he mused, “the world is full of human vampires preying, or attempting to prey upon the weak around them. Mr. Grimson, Randall, Robson, villains are very plentiful, and they are thriving, too. I wonder why so many men are honest when it pays so well to be a rogue?”

John found afterwards that roguery was not so safe a course to trust to; but on this evening he almost despaired of doing right, when so many opposed him and did wrong.

CHAPTER XII.

A GLIMPSE OF LIGHT.

JOHN was unusually quiet and thoughtful the whole of the next day. It was hard to meet the manager with an unconcerned countenance, when he knew how cruelly he was persecuting the woman who had told him her pitiful story on the previous evening. It was hard also to interest himself in the dry details of ledgers and day-books, when the conviction was settling heavily upon him that a complicated scheme of villainy was being worked out, almost under his eyes, having for its object the destruction of the happiness and welfare of his best friends, and the sensation was the more unpleasant, because he was himself powerless at that moment to do anything. He could only watch and wait in deep anxiety until some light was thrown upon the machinations of the men whom he felt were at work around him.

“Mr. Hamilton did not require his services in his private room that day, and Mr. Grimson carefully avoided meeting him except when it was absolutely necessary. John was glad of the comparative quiet which he thus enjoyed, and spent the day for the chief part in musing upon Mrs. Hamilton’s story, and upon Isabel. It was sweet to think of her amid so much that was depressing, and his mind was calmed and quieted even by the thought. The day was over at last, and John returned to his lodgings. He partook of tea, and then set himself to complete some accounts which had been entrusted to him by Mr. Hamilton, and which were required the next day. This done, he glanced at his watch, and found that he was late for his appointment with Isabel. This did not annoy him, however, for it was an understood thing between them that if he did not meet her at the entrance of her place of business, he would come to her lodgings, and thither John betook himself.

He was not very late, however, for he overtook her before she had reached the house. She met him with a bright, sunny

smile, that removed nearly all John's mental cobwebs, and held out her hand to be taken in his.

"Did you think I was not coming, my darling?" he asked, as they met.

"No, I had more confidence in you than that," she replied, softly; "you promised, you know; and then, of course, you would come."

This was unanswerable reasoning, which John could not overturn, even if he wished to do so.

"I was glad and sorry that you could not come last night," he said, drawing her arm through his own; "sorry, because no day seems complete unless I have seen you; and glad, because it was the means of bringing me a note from you—the very first."

"I hope you thoroughly appreciated it," she replied, with a merry laugh; "it was very wise, was it not—quite full of learning and philosophy."

"I am afraid I should not prize it so much if it were—you are too good to be clever," he answered, rather gravely.

"Do you mean to imply that all clever people are not good?" she asked, in the same tone as he had used; "if this is your meaning I am afraid we cannot agree. I believe that a great many clever people are very sincere and earnest, and use their talents properly."

"I do not mean the real cleverness which makes great men and noble women," he explained; "I was referring only to what the world calls cleverness—a mere showy, hollow faculty of appearing smart and brilliant—a faculty which generally leads its possessor into sin and vice. Cleverness is a very dangerous quality to have—a little of it is more dangerous than a little learning—and you know the proverb about that."

"Yes, I remember it very well," she replied, trying to smile; but her eyes were filled with tears, for his remarks had carried her thoughts to her brother, and she felt that his cleverness had, in a great measure, led to his ruin. She was silent for a few moments, and John perceived that she was pained because of something, and it was not difficult to divine the cause.

"You are thinking about your brother," he said, gently; "I was not referring to him, believe me, in what I said. I had no intention, whatever, of mentioning him in any way."

"I am quite aware of that," she replied, but still in a rather distressed voice; "but it always pains me to think of what he might have won, and what he has lost by his drinking propensities. He might have been a very successful man, and now he is little better than a wreck of his former self."

"He may reform yet, and this lesson may do him good," answered John, cheerfully; "it has been bitter and humiliating enough."

"But he does not seem to feel the degradation, as he ought," she said; "there are moments, even in his sober moods, when he appears perfectly contented in his abasement."

"That may be a mere cloak to his real feelings," John observed; "or else the reaction and stupor caused by drink. He must feel his humiliation—every man in his position does, more or less—even without the

education he has received. Have you heard from him lately?"

"Only yesterday," she replied. "He is hard at work, apparently, and is rapidly completing the work. I expect him back to Liverpool in another fortnight."

They were at the door of her dwelling-place, and she went to prepare for a walk, whilst John sat in the parlour waiting. His patience was not greatly tried, however, for she re-appeared in a short time in a bewitching walking costume.

"You are determined to fascinate the guileless youth of the town this evening," he said, laughingly.

"I have fascinated the only one that I care for," she replied, with an arch smile, "and I believe he is the most innocent among them."

"Still it is a fearful risk, to walk out with you like that," he said, in the same tone. "I might be surrounded by a crowd of swains, all righteously indignant because I shut them out from your favour."

"I think you may venture," she replied, laughingly. "However, if you are very ner-

vous, you may stay here and hide your diminished head."

"No, that would never do," he said, taking his hat and preparing to start. "I must run the risk, and screw up my courage as well as I can."

When they were fairly out in the street, John asked suddenly where they were going to.

"I really do not know," replied Isabel; "I should like to go either to the Gardens or over the river."

"There is very little over the river worth seeing," observed John, "so I think we cannot do better than go to the Gardens—unless, indeed, you would like to see the new burlesque."

"No; I dislike going to theatres," was the very decided but quiet reply. "I do not admire tinsel and spangles and the other things which make the stage attractive. If there were a good drama or tragedy by a real thinking, noble mind, like Shakespeare, it would be different, but burlesques are really intolerable—at least, I think so."

John was fond of a good play now and again, and thought a clever burlesque amusing, but as Isabel was disinclined to go, he did not press the matter. It was accordingly decided that they should go to the Gardens again, and calling a cab, they were soon put down at the entrance-gate.

It was a pleasant evening—neither hot nor cold—and the landscape around them was tinged with that varied hue and indistinct misty appearance which forebodes the coming of winter. The hills in the distance were blue and hazy, and the river had a cold glittering appearance that reflected dimly the rays of the setting sun.

“It is very pleasant, Isabel, dear,” he said, as they sat on one of the seats in the Gardens. “Nature seems to be reposing tranquilly to-night. One would scarcely imagine, looking at the scene from here, how near we are to a great overcrowded town.”

“The contrast, perhaps, makes the landscape the more beautiful,” she replied. “We should not appreciate the country so much if we were not compelled to stay in towns.”

"True; but I think that those who are always in the country are by far the happiest," he said, with a smile; "they have but few cares to trouble them, and not half the expense we have in town."

"Their incomes are, as a rule, smaller," she answered, "but still, I have no doubt, they ought to be happier. As a matter of fact, I don't suppose they are any more contented than we are, and probably less so. They are continually envying the delight of walking up and down hard pavements until our feet ache, listening to the endless rattle of vehicles until our heads are ready to split, and working with body and mind from morning till night. I think a country life by far the best."

"It was in the country that I saw you first, Isabel, dear," he said, tenderly—"in the fields at Saltleigh. That dear old place! I actually love it, because we met there first. We will visit it together, dear, sometime. But what were you doing down there?"

The colour deepened upon her cheeks, but, fortunately for her, John's attention was attracted, just at that moment, by a shabbily-

dressed, woe-begone looking woman, who passed them, to whom John nodded. It was Mrs. Randall Smith, more limp, and threadbare, and seedy in appearance than ever, and with the same rusty black gown and tattered shawl which John remembered so well, as eye-sores, ever before him during his residence in Great Lormond Street. She did not speak to him, but passed on, after nodding in a half-confidential, half-deferential manner that was highly amusing.

"Do you know that woman?" asked John, as the lady in question walked rapidly away.

"No; I have never seen her before to my knowledge," replied Isabel, glad of this respite from his questions respecting her stay at Saltleigh.

"She is the wife of Smith, the late secretary of the Mynydd Mawr Company, or secretary to the *late* Mynydd Mawr Company—it is the same thing," observed her companion. "I do not suppose that she suspected we knew anything at all about it."

"But this woman is very poor," objected Isabel, "and people said that her husband

made a great sum of money by the speculation."

"I am sure he has taken it all with him, then—all his share," replied John. "I do not suppose he cares much whether his wife lives or starves, provided he has the means of enjoyment. But you have not yet told me what you were doing at Saltleigh, Isabel?"

"I might fairly ask you the same question," she retorted, with slightly increased colour, and drooping eyelids; "of the two, it was more strange that you should be there."

"Oh! I was down with a sick gentleman, a relation of Mr. Hamilton's," answered John, readily; "he died the next day, and we buried him at Saltleigh."

"How very painful!" she exclaimed, but she found the attempt to stifle his curiosity an unavailing one—he was determined to know, and she was compelled to answer in some fashion.

"I was down in the village, in order to look for a friend whom I had heard was there," she said, in a low voice. "I was unsuccessful in my search, and was much

troubled about it. I was passing the church one day, and found it open. I used to go there several times a-day after that."

"Who was this friend?" persisted John, who thought he had a right to know.

"It is better that you should not know," she replied, gently; "the knowledge can do you no possible good, and it would pain me to reveal it."

Her voice was so sad and gentle that it was impossible to be offended. Just then, Mrs. Smith suddenly appeared again from one of the side-walks, nodded again in the same half-familiar, half-respectful way, and passed on. John took but little notice of her, but Isabel was amused.

"I should not be surprised if she has something particular to say to you," she said, playfully; "perhaps she wishes you to draw up her will, and settle her affairs for her."

"It would not be a very formidable task," replied he, with a laugh. "I do not suppose she has much to bequeath to any one, unless it is a few hundred shares in the Mynydd Mawr Lead Company (Limited)."

"I think I shall ask her for them," said Isabel, laughingly; "she seems in a very benevolent and charitable mood just now. Perhaps she would give me them."

Mrs. Smith re-appeared, and passed them in the same fashion as before.

"She is merely examining you a little closely, Isabel," said her lover, with a merry laugh; "she is anxious to make the acquaintance of the future Mrs. Raymond, and is afraid to speak to you without the introduction which she expects me to give her. Mrs. Smith is the soul of politeness."

"Come away, sir, and don't talk nonsense," was the laughing reply. "I do not wish to have her here again with that mysterious nod. I am sure I should laugh."

John arose from the seat, and, taking his arm, Isabel and he walked slowly through the Gardens, followed, at a safe distance, by Mrs. Smith. At the gate they stopped, and John, happening to look behind, saw Mrs. Smith walking slowly towards them, with an unconscious air that was highly mysterious and amusing at the same time. Isabel laughed

when her attention was drawn to it, but John became grave as he reflected that there was probably some cause for this conduct. Whatever opinion he might have respecting Randall Smith, his wife had been obliging and kind upon all occasions, and it was only her misfortune, and not her fault, that her husband was a scamp, and that she was rather too much beneath his control. She was certainly not one who would follow them from any feeling of idle curiosity, and as she still kept upon their track as they drew nearer to the town, John was persuaded that something unusual was about to occur.

He did not, however, allow his companion to notice this, and he was, in fact, unusually gay, and in very high spirits.

"We will have a house somewhere in this direction, Isabel," he said, as they passed a row of newly-built and handsome residences on the border of the town; "it will be a nice walk to business, and we can imagine that we are in the country."

"It would not require a very violent stretch of our imaginations," she replied, laughingly;

"only in the country, people have no next-door neighbours, and they do not pay for the water as we should have to do here."

"It would have all, or nearly all, the advantages of country life without its disadvantages," argued John; "there would be plenty of society here which cannot be got in the country, and our neighbours would be well-educated—another point in which rustics are generally deficient."

"The place will be charming, I have no doubt," remarked Isabel, as a concluding sentiment, "but it will be soon enough to find out its disadvantages and its excellencies when we are established in it."

"Your wisdom is at fault for once, Isabel," he said, with mock gravity; "I should certainly think that these ought to be ascertained, so far as possible, beforehand."

They were crossing the street, and in doing so Isabel glanced backwards along the route which they had just taken, and she perceived Mrs. Smith still plodding patiently after them. The amusement that this knowledge had excited in her at the Gardens was gone now—

there was a sudden feeling of terror at her heart when she thought of her brother, and the share he had taken in the formation of the fraudulent company, of which this woman's husband was secretary.

The more she reflected upon the matter the more alarmed she became. What could this woman want with her companion, who had no connection whatever with her husband's affairs? Clearly nothing, and on the other hand, she knew how deeply implicated her brother was in the matter. She could not help feeling some surprise that anyone had been able to discover *her* relationship to the engineer; but she concluded that this must have been found out in some way—her whole theory was based upon the fact that Mrs. Smith knew Hewitt to be her brother, and, therefore, she was following her, with what object remained to be seen.

The colour faded from her cheeks, and she felt ill and sick at heart. John noticed her agitation, and asked, in alarm, what caused it.

"Nothing—only a little fear that this woman has something to tell me concerning

my brother," she said, faintly ; " she would not follow us like this without an object, and I am very much afraid——"

" Nonsense," he interrupted, in a reassuring tone of voice ; " she has no idea that you are his sister. How should she know? I'll tell you what she is up to. I lodged in her house once, and now that her husband is away, she must be very poor—you can see that by her appearance—and she is about to apply to me for help."

This view was a very plausible one, and almost satisfied Isabel, but she could not be quite secure and easy in her mind, until he promised to speak to the woman, after seeing her home, and then return to communicate to her whatever tidings, good or evil, Mrs. Smith might have. John was rather loth to promise this, for if the news were evil it would be only increasing Isabel's anxieties to tell her of it. After seeing her home, and renewing his promise to return, he proceeded leisurely towards his own lodgings. He did not speak to Mrs. Smith in the street, for she was not exactly the person one would like to

be seen conversing with in public, but he took care to allow her to keep pace with him, and to follow him to his residence.

He had not been in-doors many minutes before the landlady came up and informed him that a "person" at the door wished to see him. He directed her to show the visitor up, who proved, of course, to be Mrs. Smith—not exactly the Mrs. Smith he had known in former days, but strengthened and emboldened by the hardships she had evidently undergone.

"I have made bold to call upon you, sir," she began, in a voluble way that John had never heard her indulge in before, "and I am sure I am glad to see you. It looks almost like the old days when you was in our place, before the troubles came," and here she made an effort to cry.

John disliked women's tears, especially when they were got up for the occasion. The genuine article, he thought, was bad enough, but this was simply intolerable.

"To think of my being left all alone, sir! as was always fond of seeing gentlemen, as was

gentlemen, sir, like you, coming in, and never a word of comfort or anyone to help in the whole place as was once so lively, and all through Smith getting himself into trouble, which I was always against; and him used to be very steady down town, sir; it quite knocks the life out of me."

"You are very much changed, Mrs. Smith," observed John, gravely; "you feel your wrongs more keenly than you used to do."

"And who wouldn't feel them, sir?" she cried, shrilly; "I've been patient like a mule, and stood ever so much, and never a farthing coming in, and him enjoying himself in Paris, by all accounts, with plenty of money, and never a penny to his wife as was married to him, sir, these twenty years, in St. George's own church, which everybody knows as being done by banns. The things I've gone through, sir, you wouldn't believe; and I am gone clean desperate like at last—sick of scheming and planning, and contriving for to get himself into trouble—just nothing else."

"The mischief is done now, Mrs. Smith, and we cannot remedy it," remarked John, quietly.

"It *ain't* done, sir," was the emphatic reply; "that villain Robson as was always putting up Smith to mischief, and him getting all the money, or the best part of it, through Smith being a little soft and not seeing beyond his nose, which turns down, as it happens—that rascal, sir, is up to the old game again. He is just determined to ruin Mr. Hamilton, as is a gentleman in which you take considerable interest, sir, as is quite right and proper too; and him a real born gentleman as never did nobody no harm; it clean maddens me, especially as he is a sending for Smith, saying as everything is all square and right, and him to come home any time to do *his* dirty work. Human nature can't stand it, sir, as is a thing poor Smith has a high opinion of."

"Has he really sent for him home?" asked John, doubtfully, for he was aware that the affairs of the company were by no means adjusted, and that if the irate shareholders laid hands upon the secretary, he would, in all probability, be made the scapegoat for the sins of everyone connected with the swindle;

"are you not aware of the very serious risk he is running?"

"Risk, sir? I just believe you," she responded, indignantly; "that's just what aggravates me. *He* knows perfectly well the risk the poor man'll have to run; but what does he care, so long as his dirty work is done? Not he! What do they give people who run off like this, sir?" she asked, anxiously, as if the idea had just struck her.

"Penal servitude for a good long term, I believe," he replied, quietly.

"Penal servitude? Just fancy that, sir!" she cried, wringing her hands pathetically; "him doing penal servitude as could never put his boots on without help. He'll be a bright one; why, they couldn't make him break a load of stones, not if they was to go on their bended knees and ask him. He can't do it, sir—it wouldn't be any good to send *him* into penal servitude."

"I am afraid they would compel him to do something," he answered, with an ironical smile; "it would not be a matter of choice, Mrs. Smith."

"Well, I don't know what he could do, my dear Mr. Raymond," pursued Mrs. Smith, very decidedly; "and it is time he should make up his mind to stand it, for he is very sure to be caught, and all through that villain, who makes a catspaw of him."

"What particular scheme has this man on foot now?" asked John, who had an idea of his own upon the point, but wished to elicit as much as he could from the woman before him.

"I don't exactly know, sir," she replied, with a perplexed air. "It strikes me that Robson has succeeded in gaining some hold upon Mr. Hamilton, and he wants my husband back to put the finishing stroke to the business. Is Mr. Hamilton in this fellow's power do you think, sir?"

"I certainly do not think so," replied John, very truthfully; "on the contrary, I think he is in Mr. Hamilton's power."

"Does Mr. Hamilton know that there is a plot on foot against him?"

"I told him of it myself at the time the gentleman died, who was, you remember, in

your house for some time," replied John, significantly, and he was not sorry to see that she winced beneath the remark. "Mr. Robson took considerable interest in him, I believe?"

"You know the story as well as I do, Mr. Raymond," said the lady, frankly; "and it is no use trying to conceal our share in the business. Robson was anxious to kill him as fast as he could, and he compelled my husband to act as he did."

John believed that readily, for he was sure Robson's influence had set the lesser villain to work.

"I had no part in the business, believe me, sir," she went on, in a tone that was intended to be earnest, "except standing by and see him do it. I could not go against my lawful husband."

"Why are you here, then?" asked John, coolly. "Do you think he would approve of this conversation?"

"I do not suppose he would, sir," was the reply, and her confused conscious manner showed that she understood the taunt; "but

it was different then—quite different. I have quite done with their scheming, and want it ended.”

“Then I am to understand that it is not because you wish to help Mr. Hamilton so much as to disentangle your husband from this man’s meshes?”

“Partly both, sir,” she replied. “I do not want to see this villain succeeding in his plans, and I want, of course, to save my husband, if possible. That is only natural, sir.”

John agreed with this remark—it *was* perfectly natural that she should endeavour to save her husband from any further unpleasant complications.

“What was your object in coming to me?” he asked abruptly, after a few minutes silence. “Was it merely to tell me that your husband is coming back? The less that know it the better for him, Mrs. Smith.”

“I am sure you would stand his friend, sir,” she whined, applying her handkerchief again to her eyes. “You would not set the police upon him.”

“I do not intend doing that,” he replied,

sternly ; "but as for being his friend, you must not expect anything of the kind. Is it likely I should countenance him in any way after what has occurred ?"

Mrs. Smith murmured something behind her handkerchief about "returning good for evil."

"Tush! do not treat me to anything of that kind, Mrs. Smith," he said, contemptuously. "I will not set the police upon him, but beyond that he must expect nothing from me. Was this all you had to say ?"

"No, sir," she said, humbly, more in the old way to which he had been accustomed. "I came to ask your advice, as a gentleman who knew the parties, and could tell best what was to be done, through moving in the highest circles as you do."

John stamped impatiently upon the ground ; he had heard enough from this woman, who was so suddenly changed from a meek, submissive, household drudge into a garrulous, fawning flatterer. He preferred the Mrs. Smith of former days infinitely more than the new edition of her before him.

"I have no advice to offer you, even if I had a right to give it, which I have not," he said. "The best thing he can do is to remain where he is until the present scandal about him has worn away. Another year or two must elapse before he can safely return to England, and even then, I should imagine, that Liverpool would be too hot a residence for him."

"And what is to become of me in the meantime?" she demanded, defiantly, as if John was purposely injuring her.

"That is your own look out," he answered, calmly. "I do not see what he could do to support you if he came back; he would be only an additional burden upon you. And, further, you must remember that if he is arrested he will be certainly convicted; and is it better for you to have a husband in transportation than at liberty in Paris? If he has any of his old ingenuity left, he ought to make a living in a city where so many thousands live by their wits, and live well too."

"I should be none the better," she sighed

"He may be earning money now, for all I know to the contrary, but he never sends any to me."

"You would be no better off, I tell you, if he came here ; and the probability is that your difficulties would be much greater," he replied. "Have you told him that you were in want of money ?"

"I have never once written to him without mentioning the matter in some way," she answered. "He takes no notice of it. Perhaps, if he knew I could not keep up the house without a supply, he might send me some."

John had his doubts as to whether anything of the kind would move her affectionate partner to disburse any of his ill-gotten gains, but, in spite of his anger, he could not but pity this woman, who was cursed with such a thriftless, vicious husband.

"The very best advice I can offer you, Mrs. Smith," he said, more gently and kindly, "is to keep him out of the way. Robson must reach the end of his career before long, and when he is fairly out of way, and this lead-

mine affair has quieted a little, he may return. I hope that, when he does, he will abandon his evil practices, and turn his attention to something honest and useful. He has burnt his fingers pretty well this time, I should say."

Some people are fond of burning their fingers repeatedly, especially when it is done in the shape of making off with other people's money, which they can spend at their leisure. Randall at that moment would not object to repeat the process if he could do it with impunity. If ever he became honest, it would be because he was afraid to be dishonest. A wholesome dread of the law, which was strong upon him, was the only hope of reformation in his case.

"Would you be kind enough to write me a line to that effect, sir, to send to him?" she asked, insinuatingly. "He would be the more likely to follow the advice of a gentleman, whom he esteemed so highly, than if I was to tell him."

There was a limit to John's endurance, and he had reached it last.

"You are mad, Mrs. Smith," he said, angrily, a suspicion forming itself in his mind that this was a cunningly-contrived plan of Robson's to implicate him in the affair, although he could not conceive how this would further his views. "I will never write him a word. I merely give you the advice. If he does not choose to follow it, he may go to destruction his own way, so far as I am concerned."

"I am sure I did not mean to make you angry, sir," she whined, deprecatingly, seeing that she had gone too far. "I only thought that he would certainly stop where he is if you told him to. But if you won't, you won't, of course, sir."

This proposition could not be denied, and, as he made no reply, she rose to go.

"Keep your husband away, Mrs. Smith," he said, as he showed her to the door, "and if he is fool enough to come back let me know. Your secret is safe enough with me, and you will find it much the better plan to act honestly for the future."

With many voluble assurances of her good faith, she went away, and John proceeded to

redeem his promise to Isabel. He explained briefly that the woman merely wished for his advice, and, after an affectionate conversation and cosy supper together, he returned home once more.

Light was dawning upon his mind as to Robson's plans and intentions. He had gathered more from Mrs. Smith's conversation than that lady imagined.

It was the first glimpse of light in the darkness which had hitherto surrounded him.

END OF VOL. II.

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